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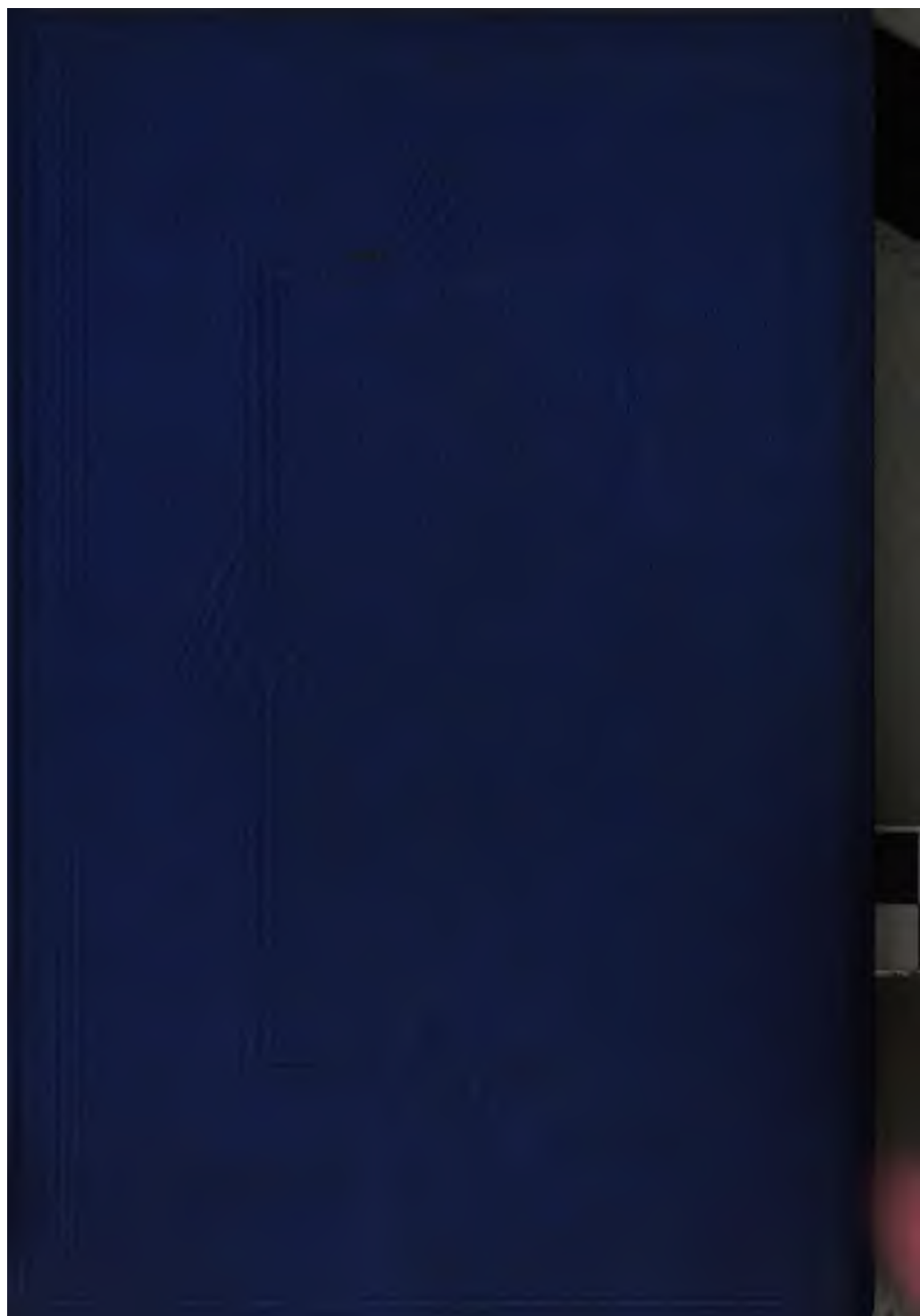
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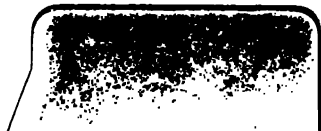
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# GRIFF;

A Story of Australian Life.

BY

B. L. FARJEON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1870.

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250. x. 285.



LONDON :  
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

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# GRIF;

## A STORY OF AUSTRALIAN LIFE.

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### CHAPTER I.

GRIF RELATES SOME OF HIS EXPERIENCES.

IN one of the most thickly populated parts of Melbourne city, where poverty and vice struggle for breathing space, and where narrow lanes and filthy thoroughfares jostle each other savagely, there stands, surrounded by a hundred miserable hovels, a gloomy house, which might be likened to a sullen tyrant, frowning down a crowd of abject, poverty-stricken slaves. From its appearance it might have been built a century ago; decay and rottenness were apparent from roof to base: but in reality it was barely a dozen years old. It had lived a wicked and depraved life, had this house, which might account for its premature decay. It looked like a hoary old sinner, and in every wrinkle of its weather-

board casing was hidden a story which would make respectability shudder. There are, in every large city, dilapidated or decayed houses of this description, which we avoid or pass by quickly, as we do drunken men in the streets.

In one of the apartments of this house, on a dismally wet night, were two inmates, crouched before a fire as miserable as the night. A deal table, whose face and legs bore the marks of much rough usage; a tin candlestick containing a middle-aged tallow candle, the yellow light from which flickered sullenly, as if it were weary of its life and wanted to be done with it; a three-legged stool; and a wretched mattress, which was hiding itself in a corner, with a kind of shame-faced consciousness that it had no business to be where it was:—comprised all the furniture of the room. The gloominess of the apartment and the meanness of the furniture were in keeping with one another, and both were in keeping with the night, which sighed and moaned and wept without; while down the rickety chimney the wind whistled as if in mockery, and the rain-drops fell upon the embers, hissing damp misery into the eyes of the two human beings who sat before the fire, bearing their burden quietly, if not patiently.

They were a strange couple. The one, a fair young girl, with a face so mild and sweet, that the beholder, looking upon it when in repose, felt gladdened by the sight. A sweet, fair young face; a face to love. A look of sadness was in her dark brown eyes, and on the fringes, which half veiled their beauty, were traces of tears. The other, a stunted, ragged boy, with pock-marked face, with bold and brazen eyes, with a vicious smile too often playing about his lips. His hand was supporting his cheek; hers was lying idly upon her knee. The fitful glare of the scanty fire threw light upon both: and to look upon the one, so small and white, with the blue veins so delicately traced; and upon the other, so rough and horny, with every sinew speaking of muscular strength, made one wonder by what mystery of life the two had come into companionship. Yet, strange as was the contrast, there they sat, she upon the stool, he upon the ground, as if they were accustomed to each other's society. Wrapt in her thoughts the girl sat, quiet and motionless, gazing into the fire. What shades of expression passed across her face were of a melancholy character; the weavings of her fancy in the fitful glare brought nothing of pleasure to her mind. Not far into the past could she look, for she was

barely nineteen years of age; but brief as must have been her experience of life's troubles, it was bitter enough to sadden her eyes with tears, and to cause her lips to quiver as if she were in pain. The boy's thoughts were not of himself; they were of her, as was proven by his peering up at her face anxiously every few moments in silence. That he met with no responsive look evidently troubled him; he threw unquiet glances at her furtively, and then he plucked her gently by the sleeve. Finding that this did not attract her attention, he shifted himself uneasily upon his seat, and in a hoarse voice, called,—

“Ally!”

“Yes,” she replied vacantly, as if she were answering the voice of her fancy.

“What are you thinkin’ of, Ally?” he asked.

“I am thinking of my life,” she answered, dreamily and softly, without raising her eyes. “I am trying to see the end of it.”

The boy's eyes followed the direction of her wistful gaze.

“Blest if I don't think she can see it in the fire!” he said, under his breath. “I can't see nothin'.” And then he exclaimed aloud, “What's the use of botherin'? Thinkin' won't alter it.”

"So it seems," she said, sadly; "my head aches with the whirl."

"You oughtn't to be unhappy, Ally," the boy said; "you're very good-looking and very young."

"Yes, I am very young," she sighed. "How old are you, Grif?"

"Blest if I know," Grif replied, with a grin. "I ain't agoin' to bother! I'm old enough, I am!"

"Do you remember your father, Grif?" she asked.

"Don't I!" responded Grif. "He was a rum 'un, he was. Usen't he to wallop us, neither!"

Lost in the recollection, Grif rubbed his back, sympathetically.

"And your mother?" asked the girl.

"Never seed her," he replied, shortly.

And thereafter they fell into silence for a while. But the boy's memory had been stirred by her questions, and he presently spoke again:

"You see, Ally," he said, "father is a ticket-of-leave man, and a orfle bad un he is! I don't know what he was sent out for, but it must have been somethin' very desperate, for I've heerd him say so. He was worse nor me—oh, ever so much; but then, of course," he added, apologetically, as if it were to his discredit that he was not so bad as his convict parent,



"he was a sight older. And as for lush—my eye! he could lush, could father! Well, when he was pretty well screwed, he used to lay into us, Dick and me, and kick us out of the house. Dick was my brother. Then Dick and me used to fight, for Dick wanted to lay into me too, and I wasn't goin' to stand that. We got precious little to eat, Dick and me; when we couldn't get nothin' to eat at home, we went out and took it. And one day I was trotted up afore the beak, for takin' a pie out of a confetchoner's. They didn't get the pie, though; I eat that. The beak he give me a week for that pie, and wasn't I precious pleased at it! It was the first time I'd ever been in quod, and I was sorry when they turned me out, for all that week I got enough to eat and drink. I arksed the cove to let me stop in another week, so that I might be reformed, as the beak sed, but he only larfed at me, and turned me out. When I got home, father he ses, 'Where have you been, Grif?' And I tells him, I've been to quod. 'What for?' he arks. 'For takin' a pie,' I ses. Blest if I didn't get the worst wallop in I ever had! 'You've been and disgraced your family,' he sed; 'git out of my sight, you warmint; I was never in quod for stealin' a pie!' And with that he shied a bottle at my 'ead.

I caught it, but there was nothin' in it! I was very savage for that wallop! 'What's disgrace to one's family,' thought I, 'when a cove wants grub?' I was awful hungry, as well as savage; so I made for the confetchoner's and took another pie. I bolted the pie quick, for I knew they would be down on me; and I was trotted up afore the beak agin, and he give me a month. Wasn't I jolly glad! When I come out of quod, father had cut off to the gold-diggings; and as I wanted to get into quod agin, I went to the confetchoner's, and took another pie. The beak, wasn't he flabbergasted! 'What!' he ses, 'have you been and stole another pie!' and then he looks so puzzled that I couldn't help larfin.' 'What do you go and do it for?' ses he. 'Cos I'm hungry, your washup,' ses I. But the beak didn't seem to think nothin' of that; the missus of the shop, she ses, 'Pore boy!' and wanted him to let me off; but he wouldn't, and I wasn't sorry for it. I was five times in quod for takin' pies out of that confetchoner's shop. Next time I was nabbed, though. The old woman she knew I was jist come out, so she hides herself behind the door; and when I cuts in to git my pie, she comes out quick, and ketches 'old of me by the scruff. 'You little war-mint,' she ses; 'you shan't wear my life out in this

here way! Five times have I been before that blessed magerstrate, who ain't got no more 'art than a pump! I wouldn't go,' she ses, keepin' hold of my collar, and lookin' me 'ard in the face—'I wouldn't go, but the pleesemen they make me. I ain't goin' agin, that I'm determined on. Here! Here's a pie for you!' and she 'olds out a big un. 'That's a rum start,' I thort, as I looked at the pie in her hnad. 'It won't do, though. If I take her pie in a honest way, where's my blanket to come from?' But the old woman looked so worried, that I thort I'd make her a offer. 'If I take your pie, missus,' I ses, 'will you let me sleep under the counter?' 'What do you mean?' she ses. Then I tells her that it's no use her givin' me a pie, for I hadn't no place to sleep in; and that she'd better let me take one while she looked another way. 'When I've eat it,' I ses, 'I'll cough, and then you turn round as if you was surprised to see me, and give me in charge of a peeler.' 'What'll be the good of that?' she arks. 'Don't you see?' I ses. 'Then I shall have the pie you've got in your hand now, and I shall get my blanket at the lock-up as well!' She wasn't a bad un, by no manner of means. 'My pore boy,' she ses, 'here's the pie, and here's a shillin'. Don't steal no more pies, or you'll break

my 'art. You shall have a shillin' a-week if you'll promise not to worry me, and whenever you want a pie I'll give you one if you arks for it.' Well, you see, Ally, I thort that was a fair offer, so I ses, 'Done!' and I took my pie and my shillin'. I don't worry her more than I can help," said Grif; "when I'm very hungry I go to the shop. She's a good old sort, she is; and I gets my shillin' a-week reglar."

"And have you not heard of your father since he went away?" asked the girl.

"No, 'cept once I was told permiskusly that he was cuttin' some rum capers up the country. They did say he was a bush-ranging, but I ain't agoin' to bother. I was brought up very queer, I was; not like other coves. Father he never give us no eddication; perhaps he didn't have none to give. But he might have give us grub when we wanted it."

"Yours is a hard life, Grif," the girl said, pityingly.

"Yes, it is 'ard," the boy assented; "precious 'ard, specially when a cove can't get enough to eat. But I s'pose it's all right. What's the use of botherin'? I wonder," he continued, musingly, "where the rich coves gets all their money from? If I was a swell, and had lots of tin, I'd give a pore chap like me a bob now and then. But they're

orfe stingy, Ally, is the swells; they don't give nothin' away for nothin'. When I was in quod, a preacher chap comes and preaches to me. He sets hisself down upon the bench, and reads somethin' out of a book—a Bible, you know—and after he'd preached for arf an hour, he ses, 'What do you think of that, 'nighted boy?' 'It's very good,' I ses, 'but I can't eat it.' 'Put your trust above,' he ses. 'But s'pose all the grub is down here?' ses I. 'I can't go up there and fetch it.' Then he groans, and tells me a story about a infant who was found in the bulrushes, after it had been deserted, and I ups and tells him that I've been deserted, and why don't somebody come and take *me* out of the bulrushes! Wasn't he puzzled, neither!" Grif chuckled, and then, encouraged by his companion's silence, resumed,—

"He come agin, did the preacher cove, afore I was let out, and he preaches a preach about charity. 'Don't you steal no more,' he ses, 'or your sole 'll go to morchal perdition. Men is charitable and good; jist you try 'em, and give up your evil courses.' 'How can I help my evil courses?' I ses. 'I only wants my grub and a blanket, and I can't get 'em no other way.' 'You can, young sinner, you can,' he says. 'Jist you try, and see if

you can't.' He spoke so earnest-like, and the tears was a runnin' down his face so hard, that I promised him I'd try. So when I gets out of quod, I thort, I'll see now if the preacher cove is right. I waited till I was hungry, and couldn't get nothin' to eat, without stealin' it. I could have took a trotter, for the trotter-man was a-drinkin' at a public-house bar, and his barsket was on a bench; but I wouldn't. No; I goes straight to the swell streets, and there I sees the swells a-walkin' up and down, and liftin' their 'ats, and smilin' at the gals. They was a rare nice lot of gals, and looked as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths; but there wasn't one in all the lot as nice as you are, Ally! I didn't have courage at first to speak to the swells, but when I did, send I may live! they started back as if I was a mad dawg. 'You be awf,' they ses, 'or you'll be guv in charge.' What could a pore beggar like me do, after that? I dodged about, very sorry I didn't take the trotter, when who should I see comin' along but the preacher chap. 'Here's a slant!' ses I to myself. 'He's charitable and good, he is, and 'll give me somethin' in a minute. He had a lady on his arm, and they both looked very grand. But when I went up to him he starts back too, and ses, 'Begawn, young reperrerbate!' When I heerd

that, I sed, 'Charity be blowed!' and I goes and finds out the trotter-man, and takes two trotters, and no one knows nothin' about it."

Before he had finished his story, the girl's thoughts had wandered again. A heavy step in the adjoining apartment roused her.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"That's Jim Pizey's foot," replied the boy; "they're up to some deep game, they are. They was at it last night."

"Did you hear them talking about it, Grif?" she asked, earnestly.

"A good part of the time I was arf asleep," Grif replied, "and a good part of the time I made game that I was asleep. I heerd enough to know that they're up to somethin' precious deep and dangerous. But, I say, Ally, you won't peach, will you? I should get my neck broke if they was to know that I blabbed."

"Don't fear me, Grif," said the girl; "go on."

"Jim Pizey, of course he was at the 'ead of it, and he did pretty nearly all the talkin'. The Tenderhearted Oysterman, he put in a word sometimes, but the others only said yes and no. Jim Pizey he ses, 'We can make all our fortunes, mates, in three months, if we're game. It'll be a jolly life,

and I know every track in the country. We can "stick-up" \* the gold escort in the Black Forest, and we don't want to do nothin' more all our lives. Forty thousand ounces of gold, mates, not a penny-weight less!' Then the Tenderhearted Oysterman ses he didn't care if there was forty million ounces, he wouldn't have nothin' to do with it, if Jim wanted to hurt the poor coves. Didn't they larf at him for sayin' that!"

"Is he a kind man, Grif?"

"The Tenderhearted Oysterman, do you mean, Ally?" asked the boy, in return.

"Yes, is he really tenderhearted?"

"He's the wickedest, cruellest, of all the lot, Ally. They call him the Tenderhearted Oysterman out of fun. He's always sayin' how soft-hearted he is, but he would think as much of killin' you and me as he would of killin' a fly. After that I falls off in a doze, and presently I hears 'em talkin' agin, between-whiles, like, 'If the escort's too strong for us,' ses Jim Pizey, 'we can tackle the squatter's stations. Some of the squatters keep heaps of money in their houses.' And then they called over the names of a lot of stations where the squatters was rich men."

\* "Sticking-up" is an Australian term for burglary and highway robbery.



"Did you hear them mention Highlay Station, Grif?" the girl asked, anxiously.

"Can't say I did, Ally."

The girl gave a sigh of relief, and then asked,—

"Who were there, Grif, while they were talking?"

"There was Jim Pizey, and Ned Rutt, and Black Sam, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman, and——" but here Grif stopped, suddenly.

"Who else, Grif?" asked the girl, laying her hand upon his arm.

"I was considerin', Ally," the boy replied, casting a furtive look at her white face, "if there *was* anybody else. I was 'arf asleep, you know."

The girl gazed at him with such distress depicted in her face that Grif turned his eyes from her, and looked uneasily upon the ground. For a few moments she seemed as if she feared to speak, and then she inquired in a voice of pain,—

"Was my husband there, Grif?"

Grif threw one quick, sharp glance upon her, and, as if satisfied with what he saw, turned away again, and did not reply.

"Was my husband there, Grif," the girl repeated.

Still the boy did not reply. He appeared to be possessed with some dogged determination not to answer her question.

"Grif," the girl said, in a voice of such tender pleading that the tears came into the boy's eyes, "Grif, be my friend!"

"Your friend, Ally!" he exclaimed, in amazement, and as he spoke a thrill of exquisite pleasure quivered through him. "Me! A pore beggar like me!"

"I have no one else to depend upon—no one else to trust to—no one else to tell me what I must, yet what I dread to hear. Was my husband there, Grif?"

"Yes, he was there," the boy returned, reluctantly; "more shame for him, and you a sittin' here all by yourself. I say, Ally, why don't you cut away from him? What do you stop here for?"

"Hush!" she said. "Was he speaking with them about the plots you told me of?"

"No, he was very quiet. They was a tryin' to persuade him to join 'em; but he wouldn't agree. They tried all sorts of games on him. They spoke soft, and they spoke hard. They give him lots of lush, too, and you know, Ally, he *can*—" but Grif pulled himself up short, dismayed and remorseful, for his companion had broken into a passionate fit of weeping.

"I didn't mean to do it, Ally," he said, sorrow-

fully. "Don't take on so. I'll never say it agin. I'm a ignorant beast, that's what I am!" he exclaimed, digging his knuckles into his eyes. "I'm always a puttin' my foot in it."

"Never mind, Grif," said the girl, sobbing. "Go on. Tell me all you heard. I must know. Oh, my heart! My heart!" and her tears fell thick and fast upon his hand.

He waited until she had somewhat recovered herself, and then proceeded very slowly.

"They was a-tryin' to persuade him to join 'em. They tried all sorts of dodges, but they was all no go. The Tenderhearted Oysterman, he comes the tender touch, and ses, 'I'm a soft-hearted coye, you know, mate, and I wouldn't kill a worm, if I thort I should 'urt him; if there was any violence a-goin' to be done, I wouldn't be the chap to have a 'and in it.' 'Then why do you have anythin' to do with it?' arks your —— you know who I mean, Ally? 'Because I think it'll be a jolly good spree,' ses the Oysterman, 'and because I know we can make a 'eap of shiners without nobody bein' the worse for it.' But they couldn't get him to say Yes; and at last Jim Pizey he gets up in a awful scot, and he ses, 'Look here, mate, we've been and let you in this here scheme, and we ain't a-goin' to have it,

blown upon. You make up your mind very soon to join us, or it'll be worse for you.'"

"And my husband——"

"I didn't hear nothin' more. I fell right off asleep, and when I woke up they was gone."

"Grif," said the girl, "he must not join in this plot. I *must* keep him from crime. He has been unfortunate—led away by bad companions."

"Yes," put in Grif, "we're a precious bad lot, we are."

"But his heart is good, Grif," she continued.

"What does he mean by treatin' you like this, then?" interrupted Grif, indignantly. "You've got no business here, you haven't. You ought to have a 'ouse of your own, you ought."

"I can't explain; you would not understand," she said. "Enough that he is my husband; it is sufficient that my lot is linked with his; it is sufficient that, through poverty and disgrace, I must be by his side. I can never desert him while I have life. God grant that I may save him yet!"

The boy was hushed into silence by her solemn earnestness.

"He is weak, Grif, and we are poor. It was otherwise once. Those who should assist us will

not do so, unless I break the holiest tie—and so we must suffer together.”

“I don’t see why you should suffer,” said Grif, doggedly; “you don’t deserve to suffer, you don’t.”

“Did you ever have a friend, my poor Grif,” the girl said, “whom you loved, and for whose sake you would have sacrificed even the few sweets of life you have enjoyed?”

Grif pondered, but being unable to come to any immediate conclusion upon the point, did not reply.

“It is so with me,” Alice continued. “I would sacrifice everything for him and for his happiness: for I love him! Ah! how I love him! When he is away from me he loses hope for my sake, not for his own, I know. If he is weak, I must be strong. It is my duty.”

She loved him. Yes. No thought that he might be unworthy of the sacrifice she had already made for him tainted the purity of her love, or weakened her sense of duty.

“I’ve got a dawg, Ally,” Grif said, musingly, after a pause. “He ain’t much to look at, but he’s very fond of me. Rough is his name. The games we have together, me and Rough! He’s like a brother to me, is Rough. I often wonder what he can see in me, to be so fond of me—but then they say dawgs

ain't got no sense, and that's a proof of it. But if he ain't got sense, he's got somethin' as good. Pore old Rough! One day a cove was agoin' to make a rush at me—it was the Tenderhearted Oysterman (we always had a down on each other, I think!)—when Rough, he pounces in, and gives him a nip in the calf of his leg. Didn't the Oysterman squeal! He swore, that day, that he would kill the dawg; but he'd better not try! Kill Rough!" and, at the thought of it, the tears came into the boy's eyes; "and him never to rub his nose agin me any more, after all the games we've had! No, I shouldn't like to lose Rough, for he's a real friend to me, though he is only a dawg!"

The girl laid her hand upon Grif's head, and looked pityingly at him. As their eyes met, a tender expression stole into his face, and rested there.

"I'm very sorry for you, Ally," he said. "I wish I could do somethin' to make you happy. It doesn't much matter for a pore beggar like me. We was always a bad lot, was father, and Dick, and me. But *you*!—look here, Ally!" he exclaimed, energetically. "If ever you want me to do anythin'—never mind what it is, so long as I know I'm a-doin' of it for you—I'll do it, true and faithful, I will, so 'elp me ——!" Her hand upon his lips checked

the oath he was about to utter. He seized the hand, and placed it over his eyes, and leant his cheek against it, as if it brought balm and comfort to him ; as indeed it did. "You believe me, Ally, don't you ?" he continued, eagerly. "I don't want you to say nothin' more than if ever I can do somethin' for you, you'll let me do it."

"I will, Grif, and I do believe you," she replied. "God help me, my poor boy, you are my only friend."

"That's it!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "That's what I am, till I die !"

## CHAPTER II.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE rain pattered down, faster and faster, as the night wore on, and still the two strange companions sat, silent and undisturbed, before the fire. At intervals sounds of altercation from without were heard, and occasionally a woman's drunken shriek or a ruffian's muttered curse was borne upon the angry wind. A step upon the creaking stairs would cause the girl's face to assume an expression of watchfulness : for a moment only ; the next, she would relapse into dreamy listlessness. Grif had thrown himself upon the floor at her feet. He was not asleep, but dozing ; for at every movement that Alice made, he opened his eyes, and watched. The declaration of friendship he had made to her had something sacramental in it. When he said that he would be true and faithful to her, he meant it with his whole heart and soul. The better instincts of the boy had been brought into play by contact with



the pure nature of a good woman. He had never met any one like Alice. The exquisite tenderness and unselfishness exhibited by her in every word and in every action, filled him with a kind of adoration, and he vowed fealty to her with the full strength of his uncultivated nature. His vow might be depended on. He was rough, and dirty, and ugly, and a thief; but he was faithful and true. Some glimpse of a better comprehension appeared to pass into his face as he lay and watched. And so the hours lagged on until midnight, when a change took place.

A sudden change—a change that transformed the hitherto quiet house into a den of riotous vice and drunkenness. It seemed as though the house had been forced into by a band of ruffianly bacchanals. They came up the stairs, laughing, and singing, and screaming. A motley throng—about a dozen in all—but strangely contrasted in appearance. Men upon whose faces rascality had set its seal; women in whose eyes there struggled the modesty of youth with the depravity of shame. Most of the men were middle-aged; the eldest of the women could scarcely have counted twenty winters from her birth: many of them, even in their childhood, had seen but little of life's summer. With the

men, moleskin trousers, pea-jackets, billycock hats, and dirty pipes, predominated. The women were expensively dressed, as if they sought to hide their shame by a costly harmony of colours. How strange are the groupings we see, yet do not marvel at, in the kaleidoscope of life!

The company were in the adjoining apartment, and, through the chinks in the wall, Alice could see them flitting about. She had started to her feet when she heard them enter the house, and her trembling frame bespoke her agitation. All her heart was in her ears as she listened for the voice she expected yet dreaded to hear.

"Get up, Grif," she whispered, touching the boy gently with her foot. On the instant, he was standing, watchful by her side. "Listen! Can you hear his voice?"

The boy listened attentively, and shook his head. At this moment, a ribald jest called forth screams of laughter, and caused Alice to cover her crimsoned face, and sink tremblingly into her seat. But after a short struggle with herself, she rose again, and listened anxiously.

"He must be there," she said, her hand twitching nervously at her dress. "Oh, what if I should not see him to-night! I should be powerless to

save him. What if they have kept him away from me, fearing that I should turn him from them! Oh, Grif, Grif, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Hush!" Grif whispered. "You keep quiet. You pretend to be asleep, and don't let 'em 'ear you. If anybody comes in, you shut your eyes, and breathe 'ard. I'll go and see if he's there."

And he crept out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. Left alone, the girl sat down again by the fire, whispering to herself, "I must save him, I must save him;" as if the words were a charm. "Yes," she whispered, "I must save him from this disgrace, and then I will make one more appeal;" and then she started up again, and listened, and paced the room in an agony of expectation. Thus she passed the next half-hour. At the end of that time, Grif came in, almost noiselessly, and to her questioning look replied,

"He's there, all right."

"What is he doing?"

"He's a settin' in a corner, 'arf asleep, all by 'isself, and he hasn't sed a word to no one."

"Is he ——" she asked, and then stopped, as if afraid to go on.

"No," Grif said, very promptly, "he's had very

little to drink. Jim Pizey and the rest of 'em, they're there. Where are you goin'?" he inquired, quickly, as Alice walked towards the door.

"I am going in to him."

"What for?" cried Grif, hoarsely, gripping her arm. "Ally, are you mad?"

"I must go and bring him away," she replied, firmly.

"Look here, Ally," said Grif, in a voice of terror; "don't you try it. Pizey's got the devil in him to-night. I know it by his eye. It's jist as cool and wicked as anythin'! When he sets his mind upon a thing he'll do it, or be cut to pieces. If you go in, you can't do nothin', and somethin' bad 'll 'appen. Pizey 'll think you know what you oughtn't to know. Don't you go!"

"But I must save him, Grif," she said, in deep distress. "I must save him, if I die!"

"Yes," Grif said, in a thick undertone, and still keeping firm hold of her arm; "that's right and proper, I dersay. But s'pose you die and don't save him? They won't do nothin' to-night. You can't do no good in there, Ally. The Oysterman 'll kill you, or beat you senseless, if you go; and then what could you do? I've seen him beat a woman before to-night. They're mad about somethin' or

other, the whole lot of 'em. You'll do him more good by stoppin' away."

"Of what use can my husband be to them, Grif?" she cried, yet suppressing her voice, so that those in the next room should not hear. "What plot of their hatching can he serve them in?"

"I don't know," Grif replied; "he can talk and look like a swell, and that's what none of 'em can do. But you'll soon find out, if you keep quiet. 'Ark! they're a clearin' out the gals;" and as he spoke were heard female voices and laughter, and the noise of the speakers who were trooping into the miserable night. "They won't be very long together. They won't be together at all!" he cried, as the door of the adjoining apartment opened, and heavy steps went down the stairs.

"But suppose my husband goes with them?" Alice cried, and tried to reach the door; but Grif restrained her.

"There's Jim Pizey's foot," he said, with a finger at his lips; "jist as if he was tramplin' some one down with every step. And there's Black Sam—I could tell him from a mob of people, for he walks as if he was goin' to tumble down every minute. And there's Ned Rutt—he's got the largest feet I

ever sor. And there's the Tenderhearted Oysterman, he treads like a cat. I'll be even with him one day for sayin' he'd kill Rough! And there's—there's no more."

The street door was heavily slammed, and a strange stillness fell upon the house—a stillness which did not appear to belong to it, and which struck Alice with a sense of desolation, and made her shiver. A few moments afterwards Alice's husband entered the apartment. He was a handsome, indolent-looking man, with a reckless manner which did not become him. There were traces of dissipation upon his countenance, and his clothes were a singular mixture of rough coarseness and faded refinement. He did not notice Grif, who had stepped aside, but, gazing neither to the right nor to the left, walked to the seat which Alice had occupied, and sinking into it, plunged his fingers in his hair, and gazed vacantly at the ashes in the grate. He made no sign of recognition to Alice, who went up to him, and encircled his neck with her white arms. As she leant over him, with her face bending to his, caressingly, it appeared, although he did not repulse her, as if there were within him some wish to avoid her, and not be conscious of her presence.

"Richard," she whispered.

But he doggedly turned his head from her.

"Richard," she whispered again, softly and sweetly.

"I hear you," he said, pettishly.

"Do not speak to me harshly to-night, dear," she said; "this day six months we were married."

He winced as he heard this, as if the remembrance brought with it a sense of physical pain, and said:—

"It is right that you should reproach me, yet it is bitter enough for me without that."

"I do not say it to reproach you, dear,—indeed, indeed, I do not!"

"That makes it all the more bitter. This day six months we were married, you say! Better for you, better for me, that we had never seen each other."

"Yes," the girl said, sadly; "perhaps it would have been. But there is no misery to me in the remembrance. I can still bless the day when we first met. Oh, Richard, do not give me cause to curse it!"

"You have cause enough for that every day, every hour," he replied; "to curse the day, and to curse me. You had the promise of a happy future

before you saw me, and I have blighted it. What had you done that I should force this misery upon you? What had you done that I should bring you into contact with this?" and he looked loathingly upon the bare walls. "And I am even too small-hearted to render you the only reparation in my power—to die, and loose you from a tie which has embittered your existence!"

"Hush, Richard!" she said. "Hush! my dear! All may yet be well, if you have but the courage——"

"But I have not the courage," he interrupted. "I am beaten down, crushed, nerveless. I was brought up with no teaching that existence was a thing to struggle for, and I am too old or too idle to learn the lesson now. What do such men as I in the world? Why, it has been thrown in my teeth this very night that I haven't even soul enough for revenge."

"Revenge, Richard!" she cried. "Not upon——"

"No, not that," he said; "nor anything that concerns you or yours. But it has been thrown in my teeth, nevertheless. And it is true. For I am a coward and a craven, if there ever lived one. It is you who have made me feel that I am so; it is you who have shown me to myself in my true



colours, and who have torn from me the mask which I—fool that I am!—had almost learnt to believe was my real self, and not a sham! Had you reproached me, had you reviled me, I might have continued to be deceived. But as it is, I tremble before you; I tremble, when I look upon your pale face;” and turning to her suddenly, and meeting the look of patient uncomplaining love [in her weary eyes, he cried, “Oh, Alice! Alice! what misery I have brought upon you!”

“Not more than I can bear, dear love,” she said, “if you will be true to yourself and to me. Have patience——”

“Patience!” he exclaimed. “When I think of the past, I lash myself into a torment. Will patience feed us? Will it give us a roof or a bed? Look here!” and he turned out his pockets. “Not a shilling. Fill my pockets first. Give me the means to fight with my fellow-cormorants, and I will have patience. Till then, I must fret, and fret, and drink. Have you any brandy?”

“No,” she said, with a bitter sigh.

“Perhaps it is better so,” he said, slowly, for his passion had somewhat exhausted him; “for what I have to say might seem the result of courage that does not belong to me. I have refrained from drink

to-night that my resolution might not be tampered with."

He paused to recover himself; Alice bending forward, with clasped hands, waited in anxious expectancy.

"Do you know how I have spent to-night and many previous nights?" he asked. "In what company, and for what purpose?"

She had been standing during all this time, and her strength was failing her. She would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms, whence she sank upon the ground at his feet, and bowed her head in her lap.

"I have spent to-night, and many other nights," he continued, "in the company of men whose touch, not long since, I should have deemed contamination. I have spent them in the company of villains, who, for some purpose of their own, are striving to inveigle me in their plots. But they will fail. Yes, they will fail, if you will give me strength to keep my resolution. Coward I am, I know, but I am not too great a coward to say, Alice, you and I must part."

"Part!" she echoed, dreadingly.

"Look around," he said; "this is a nice home I have provided for you; I have surrounded you with

fit associates, have I not? How nobly I have performed my part of husband! How you should bless my name, respect, and love me, for the true manliness I have displayed towards you! You, by your patience and your love, have shown me the depth of my degradation."

"Not degradation, Richard, not degradation for you!"

"Yes, degradation, and for me, in its coarsest aspect. Is not this degradation?" and he pointed to Grif, who was crouching, observant, in a corner. "Come here," he said to the lad, who slouched towards him, reluctantly.

"What are you?" asked Richard.

"What am I?" replied Grif, with a puzzled look; "I'm a pore boy—Grif."

"You're a poor boy—Grif!" the man repeated. "How do you live?"

"By eatin' and drinkin'."

"How do you get your living?"

"I makes it as I can," answered Grif, gloomily.

"And when you can't make it?"

"Why, then I takes it."

"That is, you are a thief?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"And a vagabond?"

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"And you have been in prison?"

"Yes, I've been in quod, I have," said Grif, feeling, for the first time in his life, slightly ashamed of the fact.

"And you say," Richard said, bitterly, as the boy slunk back to his corner, "that this is not degradation!"

She turned her eyes to the ground, but did not reply.

"I was once a good arithmetician," he continued.

"Let us see what figures there are in the sum of our acquaintance, and what they amount to."

"Of what use is it to recall the past, Richard?"

"It may show us how to act in the future. Besides, I have a strange feeling on me to-night, having met with an adventure which I will presently relate. Listen. When I first saw you I was a careless ne'er-do-well, with no thought of the morrow. You did not know this then, but you know it now. It is the curse of my life that I was brought up with expectations. How many possibly useful, if not good, men have been wrecked on that same rock of expectations! Upon the strength of 'expectations' I was reared into an idle incapable. And this I was when you first

knew me. I had an income then—small, it is true, but sufficient ; or if it was not, I got into debt upon the strength of my expectations, which were soon to yield to me a life's resting-place. You know what happened. One day there came a letter, and I learned that, in a commercial crash at home, my income and my expectations had gone to limbo. The news did not hurt me much, Alice, for I had determined on a scheme which, if successful, would give me wealth and worldly prosperity. It is the truth—shamed as I am to speak it—that, knowing you to be an only child and an heiress, I deliberately proposed to myself to win your affections. I said, 'This girl will be rich, and her money will compensate for what I have lost. This girl has a wealthy father, not too well educated, not too well connected, who will be proud when he finds that his daughter has married a gentleman.' In the execution of my settled purpose, I sought your society, and strove to make myself attractive to you. But your pure nature won upon me. The thought that your father was wealthy, and that you would make a good match for me, was soon lost in the love I felt for you. For I learned to love you, honestly, devotedly—nay, keep your place, and do not look at me while I speak, for I am unworthy of the love

I sought and gained. Yet, you may believe me when I say, that as I learned to know you, all mercenary thoughts died utterly away. Well, Alice, I won your love, and could not bear to part with you. I had to do something to live ; and so that I might be near you, I accepted the post of tutor offered me by your father. I accepted this to be near you—it was happiness enough for the time, and I thought but little of the future. Happy, then, in the present, I had no thought of the passing time, until the day arrived when your father wished to force you into a marriage with a man, ignorant, brutal, mean, and vulgar—but rich. You came to me in your distress—“Good God !” he exclaimed, passionately ; “ shall I ever forget the night on which you came to me, and asked for help and for advice ? The broad plains, bathed in silver light, stretched out for miles before us. The branches of the old gum-trees glistened with white smiles in the face of the moon—we were encompassed with a peaceful glory. You stood before me, sad and trembling, and the love that had brought sunshine to my heart rushed to my lips ”——he stopped suddenly, looked round, and smiled bitterly. Then he continued—“The next day we fled, and at the first town we reached we were married. Then, and then only, you learned

for the first time, that the man you had married was a beggar, and was unable to provide for his wife the common comforts of a home. We appealed to your father—you know how he met our appeals. The last time I went, at your request, to his house, he set his dogs upon me—— ”

“ Richard! Richard!” she cried, entreatingly. “ Do not recall that time. Be silent for awhile, and calm yourself.”

“ I will go on to the end. We came to Melbourne. Brought up to no trade or profession, and naturally idle, I could get nothing to do. Some would have employed me, but they were afraid. I was not rough enough—I was too much of a gentleman. They wanted coarser material than I am composed of, and so, day by day, I have sunk lower and lower. People begin to look on me with suspicion. I am fit for nothing in this colony. I was born a gentleman, and I live the life of a dog; and I have dragged you, who never before knew want, down with me. With no friends, no influence to back me, we might starve and rot. What wonder that I took to drink! The disgust with which I used to contemplate the victims of that vice recoils now upon myself, and I despise and abhor myself, for what I am! How I came into acquaintanceship

with those who are my present associates, I cannot recall. By what fatality I brought you here, I know not. I suppose it was because we were poor, and I could not afford to buy you better lodging. Now, attend to me—but stay, that boy is listening.”

“He is a friend, Richard,” said Alice.

“Yes,” said Grif, “I am a friend—that’s what I am. Never you mind me—I ain’t a-goin’ to peach. I’d do anythin’ to ’elp her, I would—sooner than ’urt her, I’d be chopped up first. You talk better than the preacher cove!”

“Very well. Now attend. These men want me to join them in their devilish plots. I will not do so, if I can help it. But if I stop here much longer, they will drive me to it. And so I shall go away from you and from them. I will go to the gold diggings, and try my luck there——”

“Leaving me here?”

“Leaving you here, but not in this house. You have two or three articles of jewelry left. I will sell them—the watch I gave you will fetch ten pounds—and you will be able to live in a more respectable house than this for a few weeks until you hear from me.”

“How will you go?”

“I shall walk—I cannot afford to ride. But I



have not concluded yet. I have something to tell you, which may alter our plans, so far as you are concerned. I have a message for you, which I must deliver word for word."

"A message for me!"

He paced the room for a few moments in silence. Then, standing before Alice, he looked her in the face, and said:—

"I saw your father this evening."

"In town!" she exclaimed.

"In town. I do not know for what purpose he is here, nor do I care."

"Oh, Richard," cried the girl; "you did not quarrel with him?"

"No," he replied; "I spoke to him respectfully. I told him you were in Melbourne, in want. I begged him to assist us. I said that I was willing to do anything—that I would take any situation, thankfully, in which I could earn bread for you. He turned away impatiently. I followed him, and continued to address him humbly, entreatingly. For your sake, Alice, I did this."

She took his hand and kissed it, and rested her cheek against it.

"Now hearken to his reply," he said, disengaging his hand, and standing apart from her. "This was

it. 'You married my daughter for my money. You are a worthless, idle scoundrel, and I will not help you. If you so much regret the condition to which you have brought my daughter, divorce yourself from her.' "

"No, no, Richard!"

"Those were his words. 'Divorce yourself from her, and I will take her back. When you come to me to consent to this, I will give you money. Till then, you may starve. I am a hard man, as you know, obstinate and self-willed; and rather than you should have one shilling of the money you traded for when you married my daughter, I would fling it all in the sea. Tell my daughter this. She knows me well enough to be sure I shall not alter when once I resolve.' Those were his words, word for word. That was the message he bade me give you. What is your answer?"

"What do you think it is?" she asked, sadly.

"I cannot tell," he said, doggedly, turning his face from her; "I know what mine would be."

"What would it be?"

"I should say this" (he did not look at her while he spoke)—"You, Richard Handfield, Scapegrace, Fortune-hunter, Vagabond (any of these surnames would be sufficiently truthful), came to me, a young

simple girl, and played the lover to me, without the knowledge of my father, for the sake of my father's money. You knew that I, a young simple girl, bred upon the plains, and amidst rough men, would be certain to be well affected towards you—would almost be certain to fall in love with you, for the false gloss you parade to the world, and for the refinement of manner which those employed about my father's station did not possess. You played for my heart, and you won it. But you won it without the money you thought you would have gained, for you were disappointed in your calculations. And now that I know you for what you are, and now that I have been sufficiently punished for my folly, in the misery you have brought upon me, I shall go back to the home from which I fled, and endeavour to forget the shame with which you have surrounded me."

"Do you think that this would be my answer, Richard?"

He had not once looked at her while he spoke, and now as she addressed him, with an indescribable sadness in her voice, he did not reply. For full five minutes there was silence in the room. Then the grief which filled her heart could no longer be suppressed, and short broken gasps escaped her.

"Richard!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Alice."

"Have you not more faith in me than this? As I would die to keep you good, so I should die without your love. What matters poverty? We are not the only ones in the world whose lot is hard to bear! Be true to me, Richard, so that I may be true to myself and to you. You do not believe that this would be my answer!"

There came no word from his lips.

"When I vowed to be faithful to you, Richard, I was but a girl—indeed, I am no better now, except in experience—but I vowed with my whole heart. Marriage to me was a sacrament. I had no knowledge then of life's hard trials, but since I have learned them, I seem also to have learned what is my duty, and what was the meaning of the faith I pledged. I never rightly understood it till now, darling! You do not believe that this would be my answer!"

Still he did not look at her. Although she waited in an anxious agony of expectation, he did not speak. The plain words he had chosen in which to make his confession, had brought to him, for the first time, a true sense of the unworthy part he had played.

"If in the time that has gone, my dear," she continued, "there is any circumstance, any remembrance, connected with me, that gives you pain, forget it for my sake. If you have believed that any thought that you have done me wrong exists, or ever existed, in my mind, believe it no longer. Think of me as I am—see me as I am—your wife, who loves you now with a more perfect love than when she was a simple girl, inexperienced in the world's hard ways. Ah! see how I plead to you, and turn to me, my dear!"

She would have knelt to him, but he turned and clasped her in his arms, and pressed her pure heart to his. Her fervent love had triumphed; and as he kissed away her tears, he felt, indeed, that wifely purity is man's best shield from evil.

"You shall do what you have said, Richard; but not to-morrow. Wait but one day longer; and if I then say to you—'Go,' you shall go. I have a reason for this, but I must not tell you what it is. Do you consent?"

"Yes, love."

"Brighter days will dawn upon us. I am happier now than I have been for a long, long time! And oh, my dear!—bend your head closer, Richard—there may come a little child to need our care——"

The light had gone out, and the room was in darkness. But mean and disreputable as it was, a good woman's unselfish love sanctified it and made it holy!

## CHAPTER III.

### GRIF LOSES A FRIEND.

"It's a rum go," Grif muttered to himself, as he wiped the tears from his eyes, and groped his way down the dark stairs; "a very rum go. If I was Ally, I should do as he told her. But she don't care for herself, she don't. She's too good for him by ever so many chalks, that's what she is!"

By this time Grif had reached the staircase which led to the cellar. Crouching upon the floor, he listened with his ear to the ground.

"I can hear him," he said, in a pleasant voice, "he's a beatin' his tail upon the ground, but he won't move till I call him. I don't believe there's another dawg in Melbourne to come up to him. Jist listen to him! He's a thinkin' to himself, How much longer will he be, I wonder, afore he calls me! And he knows I'm a-talkin' of him; he knows it as well as I do myself."

He listened again, and laughed quietly.

"If I was to mention that dawg's name," Grif said in a confidential tone, as if he were addressing a companion, "he'd be here in a minute. He would! It's wonderful how he knows! I've had him since he was a pup, and afore he could open his eyes. It would be nice sleepin' down in the cellar, but we can't do it, can we, old feller? We've got somebody else to look after, haven't we? You, and me, and him, ain't had a bit of supper, I'll bet. But we'll get somethin' to eat somehow, you see if we don't."

Here the lad whistled softly, and the next instant a singularly ugly dog was by his side, licking his face, and expressing satisfaction in a quiet but demonstrative manner.

"Ain't you jolly warm, Rough!" whispered Grif, taking the dog in his arms, and gathering warmth from it. "Good old Rough! Dear old Rough!"

The dog could only respond to its master's affection by action, but that was sufficiently expressive for Grif, who buried his face in Rough's neck, and patted its back, and showed in twenty little ways that he understood and appreciated the faithfulness of his dumb servant. After this interchange of affectionate sentiment, Grif and his dog crept out of the house. It was raining hard, but the lad took



no further heed of the weather than was expressed by drooping his chin upon his breast, and putting his hands into the ragged pockets of his still more ragged trousers. Slouching along the walls as if he derived some comfort from the contact, Grif walked into a wider street of the city, and stopped at the entrance of a narrow passage, leading to a room used as a casino. The dog, which had been anxiously sniffing the gutters in quest of such stray morsels of food as had escaped the eyes and noses of other ravenous dogs, stopped also, and looked up humbly at its master.

"I'll stay here," said Grif, resting against the wall. "Milly's in there, I dare say, and she'll give me somethin' when she comes out, if she's got it."

Understanding by its master's action that no further movement was to be made for the present, Rough sat upon its haunches in perfect contentment, and contemplated the rain-drops falling on the ground. Grif was hungry, but he had a stronger motive than that for waiting; as he had said, he had some one besides himself to provide for, and the girl he expected to see had often given him money. Strains of music floated down the passage, and the effect of the sounds, combined with his tired condi-

tion, sent him into a half doze. He started now and then, as persons passed and repassed him; but presently he slid to the earth, and, throwing his arm over the dog's neck, fell into a sound sleep. He slept for nearly an hour, when a hand upon his shoulder roused him.

"What are you sleeping in the rain for?" a girl's voice asked.

"Is that you, Milly?" asked Grif, starting to his feet, and shaking himself awake. "I was waitin' for you, and I was so tired that I fell off. Rough didn't bark at you, did he, when you touched me?"

"Not he! He's too sensible," replied Milly, stooping, and caressing the dog, who licked her hand. "He knows friends from enemies. A good job if all of us did!"

There was a certain bitterness in the girl's voice which jarred upon the ear, but Grif, probably too accustomed to hear it, did not notice it. She was very handsome, fair, with regular features, white teeth, and bright eyes; but her mouth was too small, and there was a want of firmness in her lips. Take from her face a careworn, reckless expression, which it was sorrowful to witness in a girl so young, and it would have been one which a painter would have been pleased to gaze upon.

"I have been looking for Jim," she said, "and I cannot find him."

"I sor him to-night," Grif said; "he was up at the house—him and Black Sam and Ned Rutt, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman."

"A nice gang!" observed the girl. "And Jim's the worst of the lot."

"No he isn't," said Grif; and as he said it, Milly looked almost gratefully at him. "Rough knows who's the worst of that lot; don't you, Rough?"

The dog looked up into its master's face, as if it perfectly well understood the nature of the question.

"Is Black Sam the worst?" asked Grif.

The dog wagged its stump of a tail, but uttered no sound.

"Is Ned Rutt the worst?" asked Grif.

The dog repeated the performance.

"Is Jim Pizey the worst?" asked Grif.

Milly caught the lad's arm as he put the last question, and looked in the face of the dog as if it were a sibyl about to answer her heart's fear. But the dog wagged its tail, and was silent.

"Thank God!" Milly whispered to herself.

"Is the Tenderhearted Oysterman the worst?" asked Grif.

Whether Grif spoke that name in a different tone,

or whether some magnetic touch of hate passed from the master's heart to that of the dog, no sooner did Rough hear it, than its short yellow hair bristled up, and it gave vent to a savage growl.

A stealthy step passed at the back of them at this moment.

"For God's sake!" cried Milly, putting her hand upon Grif's mouth, and then upon the dog's.

Grif looked at her, inquiringly.

"That was the Oysterman who passed us," said Milly, with a pale face. "I hope he didn't hear you."

"I don't care if he did," said the boy. "It can't make any difference between us. He hates me and Rough, and Rough and me hates him; don't we?"

Rough gave a sympathetic growl.

"And so you were up at the house, eh, Grif?" asked Milly, as if anxious to change the subject. "What were you doing all the night?"

"I was sittin' with——"

But ignorant as Grif was, he hesitated here. He knew full well the difference between the two women who were kind to him. He knew full well that one was what he would have termed "respectable," and the other belonged to society's outcasts. And he

hesitated to bring the two together, even in his speech.

"You were sitting with ——?" Milly said.

"No one particler," Grif wound up, shortly.

"But I should like to know," said Milly, "and you *must* tell me, Grif."

"Well, if I must tell you, it was with Ally I was sittin'. You never seed her."

"No, I've never seen her," said Milly, scornfully. "I've heard of her, though. She's a lady, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is."

Milly turned away her head and was silent for a few moments; then she said,

"Yes, she's a lady, and I'm not good enough to be spoken to about her. But she isn't prettier than me for all that; she isn't so pretty; I've been told so. She hasn't got finer eyes than me, and she hasn't got smaller hands than me;" and Milly held out hers, proudly—a beautiful little hand—"nor smaller feet, I know, though I've never seen them. And yet she's a lady!"

"Yes, she is."

"And I am not. Of course not. Well, I shall go. Good-night."

"Good-night, Milly," Grif said, in a conflict of

agitation. For he knew that he had hurt Milly's feelings, and he was remorseful. Then he knew that he was right in saying that Alice was a lady, and in inferring that Milly was not; yet he could not have defined why he was right, and he was perplexed. Then he was hungry, and Milly had gone without giving him any money, and he knew that she was angry with him. And he was angry with himself for making her angry.

While he was enduring this conflict of miserable feeling, Milly came back to him. Grif was almost ashamed to look her in the face.

"She isn't prettier than me?" the girl said, as if she desired to be certain upon the point.

"I didn't say she was," Grif responded, swinging one foot upon the pavement.

"And she hasn't got smaller hands than me?"

"I didn't say she had, Milly."

"Nor smaller feet?"

"Nobody said so."

"Nor brighter eyes, nor a nicer figure? And yet," Milly said, with a kind of struggle in her voice, "and yet she's a lady, and I'm not."

"Don't be angry with me, Milly," Grif pleaded, as if with him rested the responsibility of the difference between the two women.

"Why should I be angry with you?" asked Milly, her voice hardening. "It's not your fault. I often wonder if it is mine! It's hard to tell; isn't it?"

Grif, not understanding the drift of the question, could not conscientiously answer; yet, feeling himself called upon to express some opinion, he nodded his head acquiescently.

"Never mind," said Milly; "it will be all the same in a hundred years! Have you had anything to eat to-night, Grif?"

Grif felt even more remorseful, for, after what had passed, Milly's question, kindly put, was like a dagger's thrust to him.

"Well, here's a shilling for you—it's the only one I've got, and you're welcome to it. Perhaps the lady would give you her last shilling! Any lady, would, of course—that's the way of ladies. Why don't you take the shilling?"

"I don't want it," said Grif, gently, turning aside.

Milly placed her hand on the boy's head, and turned his face to hers. She could see the tears struggling to his eyes.

"Don't be a stupid boy," Milly said; "I have only been joking with you. I don't mean half I

said ; I never do. Though she's a lady, and I'm not, I'd do as much for you as she would, if I was able." And, forcing the shilling into his hand, the girl walked quickly away.

Grif looked after her until she was out of sight, and shaking his head, as if he had a problem in it which he could not solve, made straight for a coffee-stall where pies were sold, and invested his shilling. Carrying his investment carefully in his cap, which he closed like a bag, so that the rain should not get to the pies, Grif, with Rough at his heels, dived into the poorer part of the city, and threaded his way among a very labyrinth of deformed streets. The rain poured steadily down upon him, and soaked him through and through, but his utter disregard of the discomfort of the situation showed how thoroughly he was used to it. Grif was wending his way to bed ; and lest any misconception should arise upon this point, it may be as well to mention at once that the bed was a barrel, which lay in the rear of a shabby house. Not long since the barrel had been tenanted by a dog, whose master had lived in the shabby house. But, happily, master and dog had shifted quarters, and the barrel becoming tenantless, Grif took possession without inquiring for the landlord. Whereby he clearly laid him-



self open to an action for ejectment. And Grif was not the only tenant, for when he arrived at his sleeping-place, he stooped, and putting his head into the barrel, withdrew it again, and said, "Yes; there he is!" the utterance of which common-place remark appeared to afford him much satisfaction. Grif's action had disturbed the occupant of the barrel, who had evidently been sleeping, and he presently appeared, rubbing his eyes.

Such a strange little tenant! Such a white-faced, thin-faced, haggard-faced, little tenant! Such a large-eyed, wistful-eyed, little tenant! In truth, a small boy, a very baby-boy, who might have been an infant, and who might have been an old man whom hunger had pinched, whom misery had shaken hands and been most familiar with. He gazed at Grif with his large eyes and smiled sleepily, and then catching sight of Grif's cap with the pies in it, rubbed his little hands gladly, and was wide-awake in an instant.

"You haven't had nothin' to eat to-night, I'll bet," said Grif.

The little fellow's lips formed themselves into a half-whispered No.

Grif insinuated his body into the barrel, and stretched himself full length by the side of the

baby-boy. Then he slightly raised himself, and, resting his chin upon his hand, took a pie from his cap, and gave it to his companion. The boy seized it eagerly, and bit into it, without uttering a word.

"You haven't got me to thank for it, Little Peter," Grif said. "It's Milly you've got to thank. Say, thank you, Milly."

"Thank you, Milly," said Little Peter, obediently, devouring his pie.

There was another pie in the cap, but hungry as Grif was he did not touch it. He looked at Little Peter, munching, and then at his dog, who had crept to the mouth of the barrel, and who was eyeing the pie wistfully. Had the dog known that its master was hungry, it would not have looked at the pie as if it wanted it.

"*You've* had precious little to eat to-night, too," said Grif to Rough, who wagged its tail as its master spoke. "We'll have it between us." And he broke the pie in two pieces.

He was about to give one piece of it to Rough, when he heard a cat-like step within a few yards of him. "Who's there?" he cried, creeping partly out of the barrel. No answer came, but the dog gave a savage growl, and darted forwards. Grif listened, but heard nothing but a faint laugh.

"I know that laugh," said Grif; "that's the Tenderhearted Oysterman's laugh. What can he want here? Rough! Rough!" he called, remarking that the dog was not by his side. Rough came back at the call. The dog had a piece of meat in its mouth, which it was swallowing ravenously. "Well, if this isn't a puzzler, I don't know what is," observed Grif. "Where did you get that from? You're in luck's way to-night, you are, Rough. All the better for Little Peter! Here, Little Peter, here's some more pie for you."

Little Peter took the dog's share of the pie without compunction, and expeditiously disposed of it. He then stretched himself on his face, and was soon fast asleep again. Grif, having eaten his half of the pie, coiled himself up, and prepared for sleep. No fear of rheumatism assailed him; it was no new thing for him to sleep in wet clothes. He was thankful enough for the shelter, poor as it was, and did not repine because he did not have a more comfortable bed. He was very tired, but the remembrance of the events of the day kept him dozing for a little while. Alice, and her husband, and Milly, presented themselves to his imagination in all sorts of confused ways. The story he had heard Alice's husband tell of how their marriage

came about was also strong upon him, and he saw Alice and Richard standing in the soft moonlight on her father's station. "I wonder what sort of a cove her father is!" Grif thought, as he lay between sleeping and waking. "He must be a nice 'ard-'earted bloke, he must! I wish I was her father; I'd soon make her all right!" Then he heard Milly say, "She hasn't got smaller hands than me!" and Milly's hands and Alice's hands laid themselves before him, and he was looking to see which were the smaller. Gradually, however, these fancies became indistinct, and sleep fell upon him; but only to deepen them, to render them more powerful. They were no longer fancies, they were realities. He was crouching in a corner of the room, while Richard was speaking to Alice; he was groping down the stairs, and calling for Rough, and fondling him; he was standing at the entrance of the narrow passage, waiting for Milly, and he was sleeping, with his arm embracing his dog; he was talking to Milly, and asking Rough who was the worst of all Jim Pizey's lot? he was listening to the Tenderhearted Oysterman's retreating footsteps; and he was standing at the pie-stall, spending Milly's last shilling. But here a new feature introduced itself into the running commentary of his

dreams. He fancied that, after he and Little Peter had eaten the pies, the Tenderhearted Oysterman came suddenly behind Rough, and, seizing the dog by the throat, thrust it into a small box, the lid of which he clapped down and fastened; that then the Oysterman forced the box into the barrel, and so fixed it upon Grif's chest that the lad could not move; and that, although he heard the dog moan and scratch, he could not release it. The weight upon Grif's chest grew heavier and heavier; it was forcing the breath out of his body. In his sleep he gasped, and fought to release himself. And after a violent struggle, he awoke.

There *was* something lying upon his chest. It was Rough, who had crawled into the barrel, and was licking its master's face. It had been whining, but directly it felt Grif's hand, it grew quiet. The rain was falling heavily, and the drops were forcing themselves through the roof of the barrel. Grif shifted the dog gently on one side.

"There's 'ardly room enough for two, let alone three of us," Grif muttered. "Little Peter, are you awake?" The soft breathing of Peter was the only reply. "You've no right to come shovin' yourself in," continued Grif, addressing the dog, who gave

utterance to a pleading moan ; “ but I ain’t goin’ to turn you out. What a night it is! And how wet the barrel is! It would be much nicer if it was dry. It’s almost as bad as a gutter!” Here came a long-drawn sigh from Rough, and then a piteous moan, as if the dog were in pain. “ Be quiet, Rough! What’s the use of botherin’ about the rain!” exclaimed the boy. “ There’ll be a flood in Melbourne, if this goes on!” And drawing his limbs closer together, Grif disposed himself for sleep. He was almost on the boundary of the land of dreams, when a yelp of agony from Rough aroused him again, and caused him to start and knock his head against the roof of the barrel. “ Blest if I don’t think somethin’s the matter with the dawg!” he exclaimed. “ What are you yelpin’ for, Rough?” The dog uttered another sharp cry of agony, and trembled, and stretched its limbs in convulsion. Thoroughly alarmed, Grif corkscrewed his way out of the barrel as quietly as he could for fear of waking Little Peter, and called for Rough to follow him. Rough strove to obey its master’s voice even in the midst of its pain, but it had not strength,

“ Rough! Rough!” cried Grif, drawing the dog out of the barrel. “ What’s the matter, Rough?

Are you hurt?" He felt all over its body, but could discover nothing to account for Rough's distress. He took his faithful servant in his arms, and looked at it by the dim light of the weeping stars. Rough opened its eyes and looked gratefully at Grif, who pressed the dog to his breast, and strove to control the violent shuddering of its limbs; but its agony was too powerful. It rolled out of Grif's arms on to the ground, where it lay motionless.

Cold and wet, and shivering as he was, a deeper chill struck upon Grif's heart, as he gazed at the quiet form at his feet. He called the dog by name, but it did not respond; he walked away a few steps and whistled, but it did not follow; he came back and, stooping, patted it upon its head, but it did not move; he whispered to it, "Rough! poor old Rough! dear old Rough! speak to me, Rough!" but the dog uttered no sound. Then Grif, sitting down, took Rough in his arms, and began to cry. Quietly and softly at first.

"What did Ally arks me to-night?" he half thought and half spoke between his sobs. "Did I ever have a friend that I would sacrifice myself for? Yes! I would for Rough! There wasn't another dawg in Melbourne to come up to him! And now

he's gone, and I ain't got no friend left but Ally." And he laid his face upon the dog's wet coat, and rained warm tears upon it.

"After all the games we've had together!" he continued. "After the times he's stood up for me! He'll never stand up for me agin—never agin!"

He knew that the dog was dead, and his anguish at the loss of his dumb, faithful friend was very keen. Had it been human, he could not have felt a deeper affliction.

"Everybody liked Rough! And he never had a growl for no one who spoke kind to him. Everybody liked him—everybody except the Tenderhearted Oysterman. The Tenderhearted Oysterman!" he cried, jumping to his feet as if an inspiration had fallen upon him. "Why, it was him as swore he would murder Rough! It was him as passed to-night when I was goin' to give Rough the pie! It was him as give Rough the piece of meat! The piece of meat! It was pizened! He swore he'd kill him, and he's done it! That's what I heerd him laughin' at."

Grif wiped the tears from his eyes with the cuff of his ragged jacket, and clenched his teeth.

"He's pizened Rough, has he?" he muttered, gloomily; and raising his hand to the dark sky, he



said, "If ever I can be even with him for killin' my dawg, I will, so 'elp me——"

This time there was no one by to check the oath, so he uttered it savagely and emphatically. Then he put his head in the barrel, and shook Little Peter awake.

"Peter," he said, "Rough's dead. Ain't you sorry?"

"Yes," said Little Peter, without any show of feeling.

"He's been pizened. The Tenderhearted Oysterman's pizened him. Say Damn him!"

"Damn him!" Little Peter said, readily.

"I'm going to bury him," said Grif. "Git up and come along with me."

Very obediently, but very sleepily, Little Peter came out of bed. Grif looked about him, picked up a piece of rusty iron, and taking Rough in his arms, walked away, and Little Peter, rubbing his eyes, trudged sometimes behind and sometimes at Grif's side. Now and then the little fellow placed his hand half carelessly and half caressingly upon Rough's head, and now and then Grif stopped and kissed his dead servant. In this way, slouching through the miserable streets, the rain pouring heavily down, the funeral procession reached a large

burial-ground. The gates were closed, but they got in over a low wall at the back. Everything about them was very solemn, very mournful, and very dreary. The night was so dark that they could scarcely see, and they stumbled over many a little mound of earth as they crept along.

"This 'll do," said Grif, stopping at a spot where a tangle of grass leaves were soiling their crowns in the muddy earth.

With the piece of iron he soon scraped a hole large enough for the body. Some notion that he was performing a sacred duty which demanded sacred observances was upon him.

"Take off your cap," he said to Little Peter.

Little Peter pulled off his cap; Grif did so likewise; and the rain pattered down upon their bare heads. They stood so for a little while in silence.

"Ashes to ashes!" Grif said, placing the body in the hole, and piling the earth over it. He had followed many funerals to the churchyard, and had heard the ministers speak those words.

"Good-bye, Rough!" murmured Grif, with a sob of grief. "Dear old Rough! Poor old Rough!"

And then the two outcasts crept back again, through the dreary streets, to their bed in the barrel.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CONJUGAL NUTTALLS.

THE March of Progress is sounding loudly in the ears of the people who throng the streets of Melbourne. It is not a lazy hum, a droning whisper, with an invitation to sleep in its every note; there is something martial in its tones, something that tells you to look alive and move along, if you do not wish to be pushed into a corner and lost sight of. It may be that the March of Progress is set to quicker time in the busy thoroughfares of Melbourne than in those of the cities of the older world. It makes itself more strongly felt; it asserts itself more independently; it sets the blood in more rapid circulation. It carries us along with it, past noble-looking stores filled with the triumphs of the workshops of the world which emigrants call Old; past great hotels whence men issue in the noonday light, wiping their mouths unblushingly, and through the swinging doors of which you catch glimpses of ex-

cited men, eating, drinking, talking, gesticulating, as rapidly and fiercely as if they thirsted to trip up the heels of Time, and take him prisoner by the forelock; past fine houses and squalid houses; through quarters where wealth smiles and poverty groans; to the very verge of the growing city, from which line the houses dot the landscape pleasantly, and do not crowd it uncomfortably—from which line are seen fair plains and fields, and shadows of primeval forests in the clouds. And here, the air which had been swelling louder and louder, until it grew into a clanging sound that banished all sense of rest, grows fainter and sweeter; here in the suburbs, as you walk in them by the side of the whispering river, over whose bosom the weeping willow hangs, the March of Progress subsides into a hymn, which travels on through the landscape to the primeval forests, and softly sings, that soon—where now grim members of the eucalypti rear their lofty heads; where now a blight is heavy on the bush, which before the burning sun had waged fierce war with it and sucked the juices from the earth, was bright and beautiful with tree and flower—the golden corn shall wave, and gladden the face of nature with rippling smiles.

The March of Progress sounds but faintly before

a prettily-built weatherboard cottage in the suburbs, where dwell the family of the Nuttalls. It is a pleasant cottage, and so Mr. Nicholas Nuttall seems to think as he looks round the parlour with a smile, and then looks down again, and reads, for at least the sixth time, a letter which is lying open on the table.

“And Matthew is alive,” he said, speaking to the letter as if it were sentient; “alive and prosperous! To think that it should be thirty years since I saw him; that I should come out here, scarcely hoping to find him alive, and that, after being here only a month, I should hear of him in such a wonderful manner. So amazingly rich, too! Upon my word,” he continued, apostrophising a figure of Time, which, with a very long beard and a very long scythe, looked down upon him from the family mantel-shelf; “upon my word, old daddy, you’re a wonder. You are,” he continued, shaking his head at the figure; “there’s no getting over *you*! You grow us up, you mow us down; you turn our hair black, you turn it white; you make us strong, you make us feeble; and we laugh at you and wheeze at you, until the day comes when we can laugh and wheeze no more. Dear! dear! dear! What a handsome fellow he was to be sure!

I wonder if he is much altered. I wonder if he ever thinks of old times. I shall know him again, for certain, directly I clap eyes on him. He must have got grey by this time, though. Dear! dear! dear!"

And Mr. Nicholas Nuttall fell to musing over thirty years ago, fishing up from that deep well a hundred trifles which brought pleasant ripples to his face. They had been buried so long that it might have been excused them had they been rusted, but they were not so. They came up quite bright at his bidding, and smiled in his face. They twinkled in his eyes, those memories, and made him young again. In the glowing wood fire rose up the pictures of his past life; the intervening years melted away, and he saw once more his boyhood's home, and the friends and associates whom he loved. As at the touch of a magician's hand, the tide of youth came back, and brought with it tender episodes of his happy boyhood; he looked again upon faces, young as when he knew them, as if youth were eternal, and time had no power to wrinkle; eyes gazed into his lovingly, as of yore; and days passed before him containing such tender remembrances that his heart throbbed with pleasure at the very thought of them. He and his brother

were walking hand-in-hand through a leafy forest; they came upon two girls (who were afterwards drowned—but he did not think of that!) whom they greeted with hand-clasps, and then the four wandered on. He remembered nothing more of that woodland walk; but the tender pressure of the girl's hand lingered upon his even after so many years, and made the day into a sweet and loving remembrance. And thus he mused and mused, and all his young life passed before him, phantasmagorically. The flowers in the garden of youth were blooming once again in the life of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall.

But his reverie was soon disturbed. For the partner of his bosom, Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, suddenly bouncing into the room, and seating herself, demonstratively, in her own particular arm-chair, on the other side of the fire, puffed away his dreams in a trice.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was a small woman. Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was a large man. Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, divested of her crinolines and flounces and other feminine vanities, in which she indulged inordinately, was a very baby by the side of her spouse. In fact, the contrast, to an impartial observer, would have been ridiculous. Her condition,

when feathered, was that of an extremely ruffled hen, strutting about in offended majesty, in defiance of the whole poultry race. Unfeather her, and figuratively speaking, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall could have put Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall into his pocket—like a doll.

Yet if there ever was a man hopelessly under petticoat government; if ever there was a man completely and entirely subjugated; if ever there was a man prone and vanquished beneath woman's merciless thumb; that man was the husband of Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall. It is a singular fact, but one which may be easily ascertained by any individual who takes an interest in studying the physiology of marriage life, that, when a very small man espouses a very large woman, he is, by tacit consent, the king of the castle: it is an important, unexpressed portion of the marriage obligation; and that, when a very small woman espouses a very large man, she rules him with a rod of iron, tames him, subjugates him, so to speak, until at length he can scarcely call his soul his own.

This was the case with the conjugality of the Nuttalls, as was proven by the demeanour of the male portion of the bond. For no sooner had the feminine half (*plus*) seated herself opposite the



masculine half (*minus*) than the face of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall assumed an expression of the most complete and perfect submission.

Mrs. Nuttall was not an agreeable-looking woman. As a girl she might have been pretty: but twenty-five years of nagging and scolding and complaining had given her a vinegarish expression. Her eyes had contracted, as if they had a habit of looking inward for consolation; her lips were thin, and her nose was sharp. This last feature would not have been an ugly one if it had not been so bony; but constant nagging had worn all the flesh away, and brought into conspicuous notice a knob in the centre of the arc, for it was a Roman. If such women only knew what a splendid interest amiability returned, how eager they would be to invest in it!

Mrs. Nuttall sat in her chair and glared at her husband. Mr. Nuttall sat in his chair and looked meekly at his wife. He knew what was coming—the manner, not the matter. He knew that something had annoyed the wife of his bosom, and that she presented herself before him only for the purpose of distressing him with reproaches. He waited patiently.

“Mr. Nuttall,” presently said Mrs. Nuttall, “why

don't you speak? Why do you sit glaring at me, as if I were a sphinx?"

To throw the *onus* of the interview upon Mr. Nuttall was manifestly unfair, and the thought may have kept him silent; or, perhaps, he had nothing to say.

"This place will be the death of me, I'm certain," Mrs. Nuttall remarked with an air of resignation.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders with an almost imperceptible motion—shrugged them, as it were, beneath his shirt and coat, and in such a manner that no movement was imparted to those garments. Ever since they had been married, something or other was always going to be the death of Mrs. Nuttall; about six times a day, on an average, since the honeymoon, Mr. Nuttall had heard her utter the complaint, accompanied by an expression of regret that she had ever married. That regret she expressed upon the present occasion, and Mr. Nuttall received it with equanimity. The first time he heard it, it was a shock to him; but since then he had become resigned. So he merely put in an expostulatory "My dear"—being perfectly well aware that he would not be allowed to get any further.

"Don't my dear me," interrupted Mrs. Nuttall,

as he expected ; he would have been puzzled what to say if she had not taken up the cue. "I'm tired of your my-dearing and my-loving. You ought never to have married, Nicholas. You don't know how to appreciate a proper and affectionate wife. Or if you were bent upon marrying—and bent you must have been, for you would not take No for an answer—you ought to have married Mary Plummer. I wish you had *her* for a wife ! Then you would appreciate *me* better."

No wonder, that at so thoroughly illogical and bigamy-suggesting an aspiration, Mr. Nuttall looked puzzled. But Mrs. Nuttall paid no attention to his look, and proceeded,—

"I went to school with her, and I ought to know how she would turn out. The way she brings up her family is disgraceful ; the girls are as untidy as can be. You should see the bed-rooms in the middle of the day ! And yet her husband indulges her in everything. He is something like a husband should be. He didn't drag his wife away from her home, after she had slaved for him all her life, and bring her out to a place where everything is topsyturvy, and ten times the price that it is anywhere else, and where people who are not fit for domestics are put over your heads. He didn't do that ! Not

he! He knows his duty, as a husband and a father of a family, better."

Mr. Nuttall sighed.

"The sufferings I endured on board that dreadful ship," continued Mrs. Nuttall, "ought to have melted a heart of stone. What with walking with one leg longer than the other for three months, I'm sure I shall never be able to walk straight again. I often wondered, when I woke up in a fright in the middle of the night, and found myself standing on my head in that horrible bunk, what I had done to meet with such treatment from you. From the moment you broached the subject of our coming to the colonies, my peace of mind was gone. The instant I stepped on board that dreadful ship, which you basely told me was a clipper, and into that black hole of a hen-coop, which you falsely described as a lovely saloon, I felt that I was an innocent convict, about to be torn from my native country. The entire voyage was nothing but a series of insults; the officers paid more attention to my own daughter than they did to me; and the sailors, when they were pulling the ropes—what good they did by it I never could find out!—used to sing a low song with a chorus about Maria, knowing that to be my name, simply for the purpose

of wounding my feelings. And when I told you to interfere, you refused, and said it was only a coincidence! That is the kind of consideration I get from you."

Mr. Nuttall sighed again.

"There's Jane," observed Mrs. Nuttall, approaching one of her grievances; "the best servant I ever had. At home she was quite satisfied with ten pounds a year; and now, after our paying her passage out, she says she can't stop unless her wages are raised to thirty pounds—thir-ty pounds," said Mrs. Nuttall, elongating the numeral. "And at home she was contented with twelve. Do you know how you are to meet these frightful expenses? I'm sure *I* don't. But mind, Nicholas, if we come to ruin, don't blame me for it. I told you all along what would be the result of your dragging us to the colonies. I pray that I may be mistaken; but I have never been mistaken yet, and you know it;" and Mrs. Nuttall spread out her skirts (she was always spreading out her skirts, as if she could not make enough of herself) complacently.

Still Mr. Nuttall made no remark, and sat as quiet as a mouse, gazing humbly upon the household prophet.

“Thirty pounds a-year for a servant-of-all-work!” continued the lady. “Preposterous! The best thing we can do, if that’s the way they’re paid, is all of us to go out as servants-of-all-work, and lay by a provision for Marian.”

A vision of himself, in feminine attire, floor-scrubbing on his knees, flitted across the disturbed mind of Mr. Nuttall.

“She must have the money, I suppose. I know who has put her up to it; it is either the baker’s or the butcher’s man. The two noodles are hankering after her, and she encourages them. I saw the pair of them at the back-gate last night, and she was flirting with them nicely. You must give information to the police, Nicholas, and have them locked up.”

“Locked up!” exclaimed Mr. Nuttall.

“Certainly. Do you think the police would allow such goings on at home?”

“Perhaps not, my dear,” said Mr. Nuttall, with a sly smile; “the police at home, I believe, are said to hold almost a monopoly in servant-girls.”

“I don’t understand your coarse allusions, Mr. Nuttall,” said Mrs. Nuttall, loftily. “What I say is, you must give information to the police, and have these goings-on stopped.”

"It is perfectly impossible, Maria. Do be reasonable!"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, glaring at her husband.

"What I meant to say, Maria," said Mr. Nuttall, clearing his throat, as if something had gone down the wrong way, "is, that I do not believe it is a criminal offence for a servant-girl to talk to a baker, or even a butcher, over a gate; and I doubt if giving information to the police would lead to any satisfactory result."

"It will be a very satisfactory result—won't it?—if Jane runs away and gets married. Servant-girls don't think of that sort of thing at home. I shall be in a nice situation. It would be like losing my right hand. I tell you what this country is, Mr. Nuttall—it's demoralizing, that's what it is." And Mrs. Nuttall wept, through sheer vexation.

All this was sufficiently distressing to Mr. Nuttall, but he did not exhibit any outward show of annoyance. Time was when Mrs. Nuttall's tears impressed him with the conviction that he was a man of hard feeling, but he had got over that. And so Mrs. Nuttall wept, and Mr. Nuttall only experienced a feeling of weariness; but he brightened up as his eyes rested upon the letter which had

occasioned him so much pleasure, and he said—

“Oh, Maria, I have an invitation for you. At short notice, too. For this evening. From Mr. and Mrs. Blemish. Great people, you know, Maria.”

Mrs. Nuttall instantly became attentive.

“And whom do you think we shall meet? When I tell you, you will be as surprised as I was when I read it.”

“Whom, Nicholas?” asked Mrs. Nuttall, impatiently. “Do *not* keep me in suspense.”

“My brother Matthew!”

“Alive!” exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall.

“Of course. You would not wish to meet him in any other condition, would you?”

“That you should make such a remark,” observed Mrs. Nuttall, “of a brother whom we all thought dead, is, to say the least of it, heartless, Nicholas. Of course, if the Blemishes are, as you say, great people, and he visits them, it is a comfort, as showing that his position is not a bad one. But, if we are to go, can you tell me what to wear? I don’t know, in this outlandish colony, whether we are expected to dress ourselves like Christians or aboriginals.”



"The last would certainly be inexpensive, but it would scarcely be decent, Maria," remarked Mr. Nuttall, sily.

"That may be very witty, Mr. Nuttall," responded his lady, loftily; "but it is hardly an observation a man should make to his own wife. Though for what you care about your wife's feelings I would not give that," and she snapped her fingers, disdainfully.

From long and sad experience, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall had learned the wisdom of saying as little as possible when his wife was in her present humour. Indeed, he would sometimes lose all consciousness of what was passing, or would find himself regarding it as an unquiet dream from which he would presently awake. But Mrs. Nuttall was always equal to the occasion; and now, as she observed him about to relapse into a dreamy state of inattention, she cried, sharply—

"Nicholas!"

"Yes, my dear," he responded, with a jump, as if half-a-dozen needles had been smartly thrust into a tender part.

"What am I to wear this evening?" she asked.

"Your usual good taste, Maria," he commenced—

"Oh, bother my good taste!" she interrupted. "You know that we are to meet your brother to-night, and I am only anxious to do you credit. Not that I shan't be a perfect fright, for I haven't a dress fit to put on my back. If I wasn't such a good contriver, we should look more like paupers than respectable people. My black silk has been turned three times already; and my pearl grey—you ought to know what a state that is in, for you spilt the port wine over it yourself. Is your brother very rich, Nicholas?"

"They say so, Maria; he owns cattle stations, and thousands of sheep and cattle. He is a squatter, you know."

"A what?" she screamed.

"A squatter."

"What a dreadful thing!" she exclaimed. "What a shocking calamity! Is he always squatting, Nicholas?"

"My dear!" said Nicholas, amazed.

"Not that it matters much," she continued, not heeding him; "he may squat as long as he likes, if he has plenty of money, and assists you as a brother should. Thank heaven! none of my relations ever squatted. Has he been squatting long, Nicholas?"

"For ever so many years," he replied.

"What a disagreeable position! Why, his legs must be quite round. You ought to thank your stars that you have a wife who doesn't squat——"

But observing a furtive smile play about her husband's lips, she rose majestically, and said,

"I shall not waste my conversation upon you any longer. I suppose the cab will be here at half-past nine o'clock; everybody else, of course, will go in their own carriages." (Here she took out her watch, and consulted it.) "Bless my soul! it is nearly seven o'clock now. I have barely three hours to dress."

And she whisked out of the room, leaving Mr. Nuttall, nothing loth, to resume his musings.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MORAL MERCHANT ENTERTAINS HIS FRIENDS AT DINNER.

ON the same evening, and at about the same hour, of the occurrence of the foregoing matrimonial dialogue, Mr. Zachariah Blemish entertained his friends at dinner. Mr. Zachariah Blemish was a merchant and a philanthropist; he was also a gentleman of an imposing mien, and of a portly appearance. Some of his detractors (and what man lives who has them not?) said that the manly bosom which throbbed to the beats of his patriotic heart was filled with as earthly desires as other earthly flesh. If this assertion, which was generally made spitefully and vindictively, was the worst that could be said against him, Zachariah Blemish could look the world in the face without blushing. True or untrue, he did look, unmoved, in the world's face, and if either felt abashed in the presence of the other, it was the world, and not Blemish. There

was a self-assertion in his manner when he appeared in public, which, if it could have been set down in so many words, would have thus expressed itself:—  
“ Here am I, sent among you for your good ; make much of me. You are frail, I am strong ; you are mean, I am noble. But do not be abashed. Do not be afraid of your own unworthiness. I do not wish to hold myself above you. I will eat with you, and talk with you, and sleep with you, as if I were one of yourselves. It is not my fault that I am superior to you. Perhaps, if you look up to me, you may one day reach my level. It would be much to accomplish, but you have my best wishes. I am here to do you good, and I hope I may.”  
As he walked along the streets, people fell aside and made way for him, deferentially. They looked after him, and pointed him out to strangers as the Great Mr. Blemish ; and it was told of one family that, when the children were put to bed at night, they were taught to say, “ God bless papa and mamma, and Good Mr. Blemish.” His snowy shirt-front, viewed from a distance, was a sight to look upon, and, upon a nearer acquaintance, dazzled one with its pure whiteness. At church he was the most devout of men, and the congregation wondered how so much greatness and so much meek-

ness could be found in the breast of any one human being. There was not a crease in his face ; it was fat, and smooth, and ruddy ; it looked like the blessed face of a large cherubim ; and it said as plainly as face could say, " Here dwell content, and peace, and prosperity, and benevolence." He was Chairman of the United Band of Temperance Aborigines ; President of the Moral Boot-blackening Boys' Reformatory ; Perpetual Grand Master of the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice ; the highest dignitary in the Association of Universal Philanthropists ; and a leading member of the Fellowship of Murray Cods. He subscribed to all the charities ; with a condescending humility he allowed his name to appear regularly upon all committees for religious and benevolent purposes, and would himself go round with lists to collect subscriptions. In this direction his power was enormous. Such a thing as a refusal was not thought of. People wrote their names upon his list, in the firm belief that twenty shillings invested in benevolence with Zachariah Blemish returned a much larger rate of interest than if invested with any other collector. Once, and once only, was he known to be unsuccessful. He asked a mechanic for a subscription to the funds of the United Band of Temperance

Aboriginals, and the man refused him, in somewhat rough terms, saying that the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals was a Band of Humbugs. Blemish gazed mildly at the man, and turned away without a word. The following day he displayed an anonymous letter, in which the writer, signing himself "Repentant," enclosed one pound three shillings and sixpence as the contribution of a working man (being his last week's savings) towards the funds of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and a fervent wish was expressed in the letter that the Band would meet with the success it deserved. There was no doubt that it was the mechanic who sent it, and that it was the magnetic goodness of the Moral Merchant that had softened his heart. At the next meeting of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals (which was attended by a greasy Australian native clothed in a dirty blanket, and smelling strongly of rum) a resolution was passed, authorizing the purchase of a gilt frame for the mechanic's letter, to perpetuate the goodness of Blemish, and the moral power of his eye.

On the present evening he was seated at the head of his table, round which were ranged some dozen guests of undoubted respectability. He was sup-

ported on his right by a member of the Upper House of Parliament; he was supported on his left by a member of the Lower House of ditto. One of the leading members of the Government was talking oracularly to one of the leading merchants of the city. One of the leading lawyers was laying down the law to one of the leading physicians. And only three chairs off was Mr. David Dibbs, eating his dinner like a common mortal. Like a common mortal? Like the commonest of common mortals! He might have been a bricklayer for any difference observable between them. For he gobbled his food did Mr. David Dibbs, and he slobbered his soup did Mr. David Dibbs, and his chops were greasy, and his hands were not nice-looking, and, altogether, he did not present an agreeable appearance. But was he not the possessor of half-a-dozen cattle and sheep-stations, each with scores of miles of water frontage, and was not his income thirty thousand pounds a year? Oh, golden calf! nestle in my bosom, and throw your glittering veil over my ignorance, and meanness, and stupidity—give me thirty thousand pounds a-year, that people may fall down and worship me!

The other guests were not a whit less respectable. Each of them, in his own particular person, repre-



sented wealth or position. Could it for a single moment be imagined that the guests of Mr. Zachariah Blemish were selected for the purpose of throwing a halo of respectability round the person of their host, and that they were one and all administering to and serving his interest? If so, the guests were unconscious of it; but it might not have been less a fact that he made them all return, in one shape or another, good interest for the hospitality he so freely lavished upon them. This evening he was giving a dinner party to his male friends; and later in the night Mrs. Zachariah Blemish would receive *her* guests and entertain them.

The gentlemen are over their wine, and are conversing freely. Politics, scandal, the state of the colony, and many other subjects, are discussed with animation. Sometimes the conversation is general, then it breaks up into sections, and, occasionally, it grows personal. Just now, politics is the theme. The member of the Lower House and the member of the Upper House are the principal speakers here. But, occasionally, others say a word or two, which utterings are regarded by the two members as unwarrantable interruptions. The member of the Government says very little on politics, and generally maintains a cautious reticence.

"I should like to have been in the House last night," said one of the conversational interlopers; "that was a smart thing Ritchie said."

"What was it?" asked another.

"Speaking of Beazley, who is awfully rich you know, and an incorrigible miser, he said, 'He congratulated himself upon not belonging to a party who had, in one of its principal supporters, a man whose office was his church, whose desk was his pulpit, whose ledger was his Bible, and whose money was his god.'"

"Very clever, but very savage," remarked one of the guests. "I do not believe in such unbridled licence of debate."

"I met Beazley the other day, and he complained that the times were dreadfully dull. He did not know what things were coming to. He had seventy thousand pounds lying idle, he said, and he could not get more than four per cent. for it. He shook his head and said, 'The golden days of the colony are gone!'"

"And so they are," said the member of the Lower House, whose proclivities were republican, "and they will not return until we have Separation and Confederation. That's what we want to set us going—separation from the home country, and a

confederation of the South Sea colonies. We don't want our most important matters settled for us in the red-tape office over the water. We don't want our Governors appointed for us; we want to select them ourselves from the men who have grown up with us, and whose careers render them worthy and prove them fit for the distinction. If we were in any serious trouble we should have to extricate ourselves as best we could, and if we *did* have help from the home country, shouldn't we have to pay the piper? That's the point—shouldn't we have to pay the piper?"

"Nay, nay," expostulated Mr. Zachariah Blemish, whose attention had been attracted to the last part of the harangue, and who did not approve of it. "Consider for a moment, I beg—we are all loyal subjects, I hope——"

"I maintain," said the member of the Lower House, excited by his theme, "that, notwithstanding our loyalty to the reigning Sovereign, the day must come when we shall not be dependent upon the caprices of a colonial office fourteen thousand miles distant, which very often does not understand the nature of the difficulty it has to legislate upon. I maintain that the day must come——"

"Gentlemen," called Mr. Zachariah Blemish,

horrified at the utterance of such sentiments over his dinner table, "gentlemen, I give you The Queen! God bless her!"

"The Queen! God bless her!" responded all the guests, rising to their feet, and drinking the toast enthusiastically. And then the conversation took another turn. Presently, all ears were turned to the leading physician, who was relating a circumstance to the leading lawyer.

"It is a curious story," he said. "The man I speak of was always reported to be very wealthy. No one knows more of his early career than that, when the gold-diggings were first discovered, he was a Cheap-Jack, as they call them, trading at all the new gold-fields. He bought tents, picks, shovels, tubs, anything, from the diggers, who were madly running from one place to another. He bought them for a song, for the diggers could not carry those things about with them, and they were glad to get rid of them at any price. When he sold them he made enormous profits, and by these means he was supposed to have amassed a great fortune. Then he speculated largely in sheep and cattle, and grew to be looked upon as a sort of banker. Many men deposited their savings with him, and, as he did not pay any interest for the money, and traded

with it, there is no doubt as to the profitable nature of his operations. The great peculiarity about him was that his face, from beneath his eyes, was completely hidden in bushy, brown, curly hair. He had been heard to say that he had never shaved. Well, one night, at past eleven o'clock, he knocked up a storekeeper at the diggings, and bought a razor and strop, a pair of scissors, a pair of moleskin trousers, a pair of watertight boots, and a blue serge shirt. In the course of conversation with the storekeeper, and while he was selecting the articles, he said that they were for a man whom he had engaged as a shepherd, and who was to start at daybreak the following morning. That was the last indisputable occurrence that was known in connection with him ; the next day he disappeared and was not heard of again. For a day or two, no notice was taken of his absence ; but, after that, depositors and others grew uneasy, and rumour invented a hundred different stories about him. A detective who knew him intimately, said that he was standing at the pit entrance of the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street, when a man passed in, the glitter of whose eyes attracted the detective's attention strangely. He could not recall the man's face, which was clean shaven, and he thought no more about it at the

time. The missing man was traced to Melbourne, but no further. Some three or four weeks after his disappearance, the body of a drowned person was found in a river in New South Wales, and, from certain marks about it, it was supposed to be that of our missing friend. The inquest was adjourned, to allow time for the production of evidence from Victoria, and twelve medical men, all of whom knew the missing party were subpoenaed for the purpose of identifying him, or otherwise. The body was much decomposed, but some of the witnesses said that they would know if it was the missing man by the peculiar shape of one of his toes. The singularity of the affair lies in this. Six of the witnesses swore that it was the missing man, and six of them swore that it was not. Both sides were very positive. Some months after the inquest, a story was current that he had been seen at Texas, which story was shortly afterwards followed up by another, that he was shot in a tavern in South America. Then came other reports that he was living in great magnificence in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. But whether he is alive or not, no one in the colony knows, and to this day the mystery is not cleared up, and probably never will be."

"And the depositors' money?" asked the lawyer.

"Was never heard of. Vanished. If he was drowned, he did not like to part with it, and he took it into the other world with him."

Everybody at the table was much interested in the story, and commented upon it; after which there was a lull in the conversation.

"I have a great surprise in store for you to-night," said Mr. Blemish, addressing a gentleman of about sixty years of age, whose face was covered with iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache.

From some unexplained cause, the gentleman addressed looked suddenly and excitedly into the face of his host, and exclaimed, in a quick, nervous voice—

"A surprise!"

"Yes, and I hope a pleasant one."

"What surprise?" he asked, in the same agitated manner.

"Nay," returned Mr. Blemish, gently, "it will not be a surprise if I tell you beforehand."

The flush that had risen to that portion of the gentleman's face which the iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache allowed to be seen, slowly died away, and was replaced by a whitish-grey tint, which almost made him look like the ghost of an antique warrior. He debated within himself for a few moments, and

then, taking out his pocket-book, wrote upon a leaf, "I shall take it as a particular favour if you will let me know what is the surprise you have in store for me; I have urgent reasons for asking;" and passed it, folded, to his host. Mr. Blemish read it, smiled, and wrote beneath, in reply, "Do you remember your brother?" and repassed the paper to his guest.

"Brother!" exclaimed that gentleman, in a voice betokening that, although he was considerably astonished, he was also considerably relieved.

All the guests turned their faces simultaneously towards the speaker, with the exception of one young gentleman, who wore Dundreary whiskers, and whose hair was scrupulously parted in the middle. This young gentleman, whose name was Tuffett, and who was Something in the Civil Service, languidly turned his head, as if the machinery within was weak, and required gentle treatment, and languidly ejaculated, "Ber-wer-other!" as if it was a word of four syllables.

"Yes," said Mr. Blemish, "your brother Nicholas."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Matthew Nuttall; and the rest of the guests stared harder than ever. Excepting Mr. David Dibbs, who was not



disposed to be too long diverted from the serious occupation of eating and drinking. For Mr. David Dibbs lived to eat; he did not eat to live.

It is a shock to a man to be wrenched, without forewarning, from the groove in which his life has been gliding for twenty years. For fully that time Mr. Matthew Nuttall, engrossed in his own pursuits and his own cares, had never once thought of his brother; and now, at the very mention of his name, memories, long buried and forgotten, floated upon his mind like the sudden rising of a ghostly tide.

"Have you seen him?" he asked.

"No," said Mr. Zachariah Blemish, "I learned by accident that he has but lately arrived in the colony. Singularly enough, he had a letter of introduction to me from some of my people at home, and Mrs. Blemish, out of respect to you, invited him this evening to meet you."

"Mrs. Blemish is always kind. I shall be very glad to see Nicholas," said Mr. Matthew Nuttall, slowly and thoughtfully; and then the conversation became more general.

"Sheep are rising in the market, are they not, Mr. Dibbs?" asked the member of the Upper House.

"It's time they was," replied the great squatter, his mouth full of pine-apple.

"The people are complaining loudly of the price of beef," observed the democratic member of the Lower House.

"They're always a-growlin'," said Mr. David Dibbs, who, having swallowed his pine-apple, was enabled to speak with greater clearness. "They don't know what they want, don't the people. Beef ought to be double the price. My motto all'as has been, 'Live and let live.' They lay the blame on us squatters, but it's the butchers as sticks it on."

"It lies between the two of you, I suppose. Did you read in the papers that Mr. Froth said at the Eastern Market last night that the squatters were the ruin of the country?" asked the member of the Lower House, who, in virtue of his position, did all he could to make himself disagreeable.

"Mr. Froth wants his head punched," said Mr. Dibbs, elegantly, "and I wouldn't mind a-doin' of it for him. Why doesn't he stick to his business? He's a ignorant, lazy—a—a——" Here Mr. Dibbs wanted a word, and could not get it.

"Demagogue," suggested one of the guests.

"That's it. He's a ignorant, lazy demagogue, and is always trying to stir up the mob."

"The fact of it is, sir," said the member of the Upper House, seizing the opportunity to give a blow to democracy, "the people, as you call them, are a discontented set. Manhood suffrage has done it all. No man ought to have a vote who has not a property qualification."

"Quite right, sir," said Mr. Dibbs. "A glass of wine?"

"With pleasure. For, sir, what is the result?" (This oracularly, as if he were addressing the House.) "These men, sir, who have no property, but have a vote, exercise a pressure upon property detrimental to the interests of gentlemen who have property. What has property to do with them, or what have they to do with property? When they have property, let them speak; until then, let them be silent, and not interfere with what does not concern them."

"Them's my sentiments," nodded Mr. Dibbs, approvingly, helping himself to more wine and pineapple.

"To what, sir, is this state of things to be attributed?" continued the orator. "The answer is plain. It is to be attributed to the unfortunate state of independence in which the working-man finds himself in these colonies. The working-

classes all over the world, sir, are democratic, often dangerously democratic. But in such a country as England they are kept in their proper position by a sense of dependence. They cannot afford to quarrel with their bread-and-butter there. But, sir, when the working-man lands upon these shores, this spirit of dependence vanishes. Speaking vulgarly, sir, he says within himself, 'Jack's as good as his master;' and acting up to the spirit of that old adage (the author of it, sir, ought to have been put into the pillory)—acting, I say again, sir, up to the spirit of that adage, he aims a blow at the interests of all of us who have property in the colony. He does not pay property the respect to which it is entitled. He becomes democratic to a dangerous degree, and has no regard for conservative interests. This must be put a stop to, sir. It is incumbent upon us, who are loyal subjects, to put a stop to it—as loyal subjects, I say, sir, for we all know what is the meaning of democracy. It behoves all of us who have settled interests in the colony to look sharply about us. We must, if necessary, band together for the protection of our own interests; and, above all, sir, we must stick to the Constitution."

"Quite right again, sir," assented Mr. Dibbs,

whose only idea of the Constitution was thirty thousand pounds a-year for himself.

All the guests, with the exception of the member of the Lower House, agreed to the proposition that they must stick to the Constitution. The way that poor word was tossed about, and flung across the table and back again, was deplorable. It was settled that the Constitution was in danger, and, at all hazards, must be protected. No one could define precisely the nature of the danger. It appeared, as far as could be gathered, to resolve itself into this—that times were very dull, and that, therefore, the Constitution was imperilled.

“Haw—haw—I have—haw—observed,” said the Something in the Civil Service, “that the—haw—sperwiwit—haw—of innovation is—haw—I may say, going it. There—haw—haw—is a difficulty—haw—in telling the—haw—back of a—haw—gentleman from the—haw—back of a ter-wer-adesman.”

Although none of the guests replied to this observation, all, with the exception of one, appeared to think that something was very wrong somewhere, and that the country was in a most distressing condition. Mr. Zachariah Blemish was the only person at the table who ventured to remark that “We are young, gentlemen, we are young, and have

plenty of time before us for improvement. In all new colonies evils are sure to creep in. We have a fine estate in our hands, gentlemen ; one of the finest estates in the world ; and all it wants is proper management. Certainly the state of commercial morality is very bad——”

Ah, here was a theme ! Commercial morality ! The guests grew eloquent upon it. The member of the Upper House said it was deplorable ; the member of the Lower House said it was disgraceful ; the leading physician said it was frightful ; the leading lawyer said it was unparalleled ; Mr. Dibbs said it was beastly ; and they raised their hands and their eyes, and shook their heads as much as to say, “ Is it not dreadful that we, who are immaculate, who are undefiled, should live in the midst of such a state of things, without being able to remedy the evil ? ” But the most impressive of all was Mr. Zachariah Blemish ; and, as a merchant of the highest standing, his words were listened to with deep attention.

Commercial morality (he said) was at its lowest ebb. The spirit of over-speculation among traders was something frightful to contemplate, and disastrous results were sure to follow. Indeed, indications of the approaching crisis were already

observable in the records of the Insolvency Court. It was all occasioned by the easiness with which men got credit—men who commenced with nothing, who had nothing, with the exception of self-assurance, and who speculated recklessly, with the knowledge that when the crash came—and come it must, sooner or later, with such-like speculators—their creditors would only be too glad to take five shillings in the pound; would feel delighted at seven shillings and sixpence; would congratulate themselves at ten shillings; and then, after giving a full release, would actually do business again, upon terms, with the very man who had robbed them. Where was honesty? Where was morality? What would become of vested interests if that sort of thing were to continue? Steps must be taken—it behoved all of them to take steps. A check must be put to the spirit of reckless speculation, and he himself had some idea of initiating a movement in furtherance of the desired result. All that was required was that merchants should be true to themselves and to their own interests, and the country would soon recover from its present depressed condition.

And after the utterance of these platitudes, Mr. Zachariah Blemish stuck his thumbs in his waist-

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coat pockets, and looked round upon his guests, who, one and all, bowed down to the spirit of honour and integrity shining in the face of their merchant host!



## CHAPTER VI.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE house of Mr. Zachariah Blemish looked out upon the sea. It was a magnificent mansion, worthy of the greatness of its inmate, and was the resort of the most fashionable, as well as the most influential, residents of Melbourne and its charming suburbs. It had a balcony round three of its sides—a broad, spacious balcony on which the guests could promenade, and talk politics, or love, or philosophy, as suited them. It was grand, on a quiet night, to sit thereon, and watch the moon rising from the sea; it was grand to watch the sea itself, cradled in the arms of night, while myriad cloud-shadows floated on its breast, and flashed into lines of snow-fringed light with the rising and the falling of the waves.

Lights were gleaming in the windows and round the balcony, and the house was pleasant with the buzz of conversation, and soft laughter, and sweet

music. The party seemed altogether a very delightful one; for a smile was on every lip, and distilled honey dropped from every tongue, while the presiding genius of the establishment was benign and affable, and moved among his guests like Jove dispensing agreeability.

The brothers Nuttall had met in the ball-room. The only words they exchanged were "Matthew!" "Nicholas!" and then, after a long pressure of the hand, they adjourned to the balcony, where their conversation would be more private than in the house.

They felt somewhat awkward; the days they had passed together might have belonged to another life, so long gone by did that time seem. The bridge between their boyhood and their old age had crumbled down, and the fragments had been almost quite washed away by the stream of Time. Still, some memory of the old affection was stirred into life by the meeting, and they both felt softened and saddened as their hands lay in each other's clasp.

They paced the balcony in silence at first. Then the elder, Matthew, asked some stray questions as to the old places he used to frequent, and smiled and pondered wonderingly as he heard of the changes that had taken place.

"And the yew, where the parrot used to swing, gone!" he said. "And the wood where we went nutting?"

"Almost a city, Mat. A tree here and there, that's all. I was thinking only to-night of that wood, and of one happy day we spent there—you know with whom?"

"I know—I know. Good God! I have not thought of it or them for twenty years. And now they come to me again. Do they live?"

"Drowned!"

"Poor girls! There, Nick, let us talk of something else. It is no wonder things have changed. We have changed more than they."

"Yes, we are old men now," responded his brother. "This is a strange meeting, Mat, and in a new world, too."

"What did you come out to the colonies for?" asked the elder brother.

"For the same reason, I suppose, that thousands of other people come out—to better myself. I don't know that I had any particular other reason, and I don't know that I exactly knew how I was going to better myself. But I thought it would come right somehow."

"Then there were the goldfields, eh, Nicholas?"

"Yes, then there were the goldfields. They did excite me certainly. I heard of people picking up nuggets—of course you laugh—and I thought it possible that such a thing might happen. I know now how foolish even the stray thought of such a thing was for me, an old man. But still the gold seemed to say to me, Come, and I came."

"You are not rich?"

"No," was the reply.

"Any fixed plans of what you are going to do?"

"No—a dozen things have occurred to me, but, to tell you the truth, I am puzzled. Everything here appears to be so—so go-ahead," he said, after hesitating for a term, "that I am bewildered somewhat. Then, there is Mrs. Nuttall!"

"Mrs. Nuttall!"

"Yes," replied Nicholas, smiling; "my wife. I will introduce you presently. She will be agreeably surprised at your appearance," and he chuckled to himself as he thought of his wife's notions of squatting. "Then there is the girl——"

"What girl?"

"My daughter."

"Daughter!" cried Matthew, almost convulsively. But he controlled himself the moment

after, and said, "A spasm, Nicholas, nothing more. What is her age?"

"Sixteen," said Nicholas. "She is here to-night. I should wish you to see my Marian soon. I am very proud of her, and hope you will like her."

"Marian! That was our mother's name."

Then there was a silence, and, as they stood on the balcony looking out upon the ocean, the snow-fringed waves might have been bringing back to them the time that seemed to belong to another life.

"Stay here a moment, Mat," said Nicholas; "I will bring Marian to you."

And going into the house, he returned with a beautiful girl, whose face was rosy with youth and health, and whose eyes beamed with pleasure. Her graceful person and her soft white dress made her a pretty figure in the scene.

"Marian, my dear, your uncle."

He turned and took her hand, and made a movement as if about to kiss her. But he restrained himself with a sudden impulse.

"This is her first ball, Mat," said Nicholas, with an affectionate look at his daughter. "Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, so much, papa!"

As she spoke, her uncle dropped her hand, and faced the sea. She was moving away towards her partner, who was waiting for her, when her uncle wheeled round, and said, as if the words were forced out of him—

“Kiss me, child.”

She raised her face to his, and he bent down and kissed her, then pushed her lightly towards her partner.

“She is a dear good girl, Mat,” said Nicholas; “and the greatest blessing I have; that is,” he added, not at all enthusiastically, “next to Mrs. Nuttall, of course. By-the-bye, Mat—how careless of me, to be sure, perhaps you have a family of your own. Are *you* married?”

“Nicholas,” said his brother, not answering the question, “do you remember my character as a boy?”

“Quite well, Mat. Eager, pushing, brave, and determined.”

“Very determined, Nicholas.”

“Very determined. I often wish I had your determination of character. Old Mr. Gray, our schoolmaster—you remember him, Mat?—used to say your determination was so determined, that it was nothing less than obstinacy. I heard him say

of you one day, when Mat Nuttall makes up his mind to do a thing, he'll do it, whether it be good or bad, and whatever may be the result. He said it was not a good trait—but he was mistaken, Mat. There is nothing so manly as determination of character. I wish I possessed it.”

“Don’t wish it, Nicholas. It often proves a curse.”

“It has not proved so to you, Mat,” said Nicholas ; “for it has brought you riches and prosperity.”

“I am rich and prosperous, as the world goes; but let that pass. Whether it be good or bad, I am not a whit less determined now than I was when a boy. I cannot help it. It is my nature. Old Mr. Gray was right. I am not to be turned from a determined purpose, whether I think I am right or wrong. Now, I have made up my mind to do what is in my power, so far as prudence goes, to advance your fortunes. But when I say to you, you must not do such and such a thing, I expect you not to do it. You are attending to me ? ”

“Yes.”

“I am glad to have seen you—I am glad to have seen your—your Marian. But there is one subject which must never be mentioned between us, and

that is the question of my family. Say that I have none. Tell Mrs. Nuttall this, and spare me any questions from her. Tell her and your"—(and here the same indecision expressed itself when he spoke of his brother's daughter)—"your Marian, that I am wifeless and childless. I must not be questioned upon the point. I have made up my mind not to be. I will not allow it to be referred to, or hinted at."

He spoke with distinctness, and yet with a strange hurriedness, as if he wished to be done quickly with the subject.

"You see those two figures yonder," he said, pointing to where the shadows of two persons could be seen upon the sea shore."

"Yes, Mat, I can see them, although my eyes are not so good as they were."

"Suppose those two should walk out upon the sea, and sink, and sink, and be lost to the world—you can suppose it?"

"I can suppose it, Mat," said his brother, wonderingly.

"Suppose they are walking out upon the sea, and that they are taking this subject with them, and that it sinks with them, and is heard no more. See" (and he waved his hand as the two figures



disappeared), "they are gone, and the subject is gone, and they are lost to us for ever. And there is an end to them and to it. You understand me, Nicholas?"

"I understand you, Mat."

"Very well. We will go in now, and you shall introduce me to your wife."

Meanwhile, the two persons, whose shadows the brothers had noticed, were pacing the shore. The tide was running out, and each receding wave seemed to ripple in sympathy with the soft touches of melody which floated from the brilliantly-lighted mansion. The music brought no pleasure to the couple walking slowly upon the sands; they were too much engrossed in their melancholy condition. The boy had been crying at some tale he had told, and the girl's voice expressed much sympathy as she said—

"And so poor Rough is dead!"

"Yes, he's dead," replied the boy; "I shall never see him agin. I hate the sight of dawgs now. I was very fond of 'em before. But didn't you say you wanted me to do somethin', Ally?"

"Wait a minute, Grif; I will tell you presently." Alice appeared to be struggling with some powerful

agitation which threatened to master her, for she stopped, and placed her hand to her heart, as if to check its beatings. "You see that house," she then said.

"Yes," Grif said, "I peeped in there a little while ago. They're very jolly, all of 'em, Ally. There's lots of swells with their white chokers, and lots of gals lookin' very sweet and nice."

"They are happier than we are, Grif," said the girl.

"I should think they was—they'd be precious fools if they wasn't! I got a squint at the kitchen—there's ducks, and geese, and turkeys, and jellies painted all sorts of colours, and sugar cakes—such a spread! I wish we had some of it here. They ought to be happy with such lots to eat. I tell you what, Ally; if I thought I was agoin' to be hung, I wouldn't mind it a bit if they'd put me down in that there kitchen jist as it is now, for about three hours. I'd like to have Little Peter with me, though—wouldn't we go it!" Grif's eyes glistened at the bare anticipation.

"I want you to take a letter for me to tha house," said Alice. "You don't mind?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll jist do anythin' as you tell me, Ally."

"You can't read."

"I can spell large letters on the walls. I never bothered about nothin' else."

"Pay attention to what I say, and do exactly as I tell you," said Alice, placing her hand on the boy's shoulder. Grif's face assumed an expression of close attention. Alice took a letter from her pocket, and continued, "Go to the house, and ask if the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed is within. If they say he is, tell them that the letter is to be given to him at once—it is very important. Do not drop it, Grif, or lose it. It contains my hope, my happiness, perhaps my life. Be sure you give it to some one who will promise to deliver it without delay."

She spoke in short broken gasps, and stayed her speech to recover her breath.

"Don't cry, Ally," said Grif; "am I to arks to see the gentleman?"

"No. You can give the letter to any of the servants; then go away and keep out of sight. If you see a gentleman speaking with me, do not disturb us, but when he is gone, and I am alone, come to me, and we will go home."

Her voice was very desolate as she spoke the last word. Grif gave a nod of comprehension, and

walked to the house, while the girl strained her eyes thitherward in eager watchfulness. The night was changing now; a low wail of wind came across the sea, striking a colder chill of desolation to her heart. She shivered, and wrapped her shawl more closely about her. But for this movement she might have been an image of Sadness, so drear and lonely did she appear as she stood upon the glistening sands.

Grif mused as he walked along; Alice's words had deeply impressed him. He weighed the letter in his hand, and thought, "It contains her happiness, perhaps her life; then the cove who gets it has got somethin' to do with Ally. I wonder who he is! I'll have a good look at him; I'll know him agin, *I* bet, after I've seen him once." Thus soliloquising, he reached the house, and, standing in the shade, watched the people flitting about. They were all so nicely dressed that he felt ashamed of his rags; it was clearly, to his mind, an act of presumption to speak to such well-dressed people. With an instinctive exercise of good judgment, he resolved to ask one of the maids to deliver the letter. A man-servant might hustle him away; a girl would be more susceptible to pity. So, plucking up courage, he walked boldly to the back-

door, and, seeing a girl with a pretty face, with a tray of custards in her hand, he approached her.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the girl, almost dropping the tray, as ragged Grif emerged from the shade into the light. "What do you want? Go away; I musn't give you any."

Grif eyed the custards hungrily and longingly. Then he wrenched his attention from the tempting glasses, and said, falsely, "I don't want nothin', miss; only if you'll please to tell me if the gentleman's name writ on this letter is in the house."

The girl looked at it, and said he was, she thought.

"Will you please give him the letter? It's very partic'ler, it is."

The girl took the letter, and said she would deliver it. Grif ducked his head, and turned slowly away. But he cast a wistful glance over his shoulder at the food for which he was longing. The kind-hearted maid saw hunger in his face, and, catching up a half-devoured fowl, ran after him. She looked round hurriedly, to see that she was not observed, and saying, "Here, dirty boy!" thrust the food into his eager hands, and ran back to the house as fast as her legs would carry her. Grif, walking carefully in the shade, commenced at a

wing; he was dreadfully hungry, but in the midst of his enjoyment he stopped, and thought of Rough, and wished the dog was there to eat the bones. The tears ran down the boy's face as he thought, and he strolled on, munching and crying. When he got to the front of the house, he saw the servant girl delivering the letter. The gentleman went in the light to read it, and Grif had an opportunity of seeing his face. "I shall know *you* agin," Grif thought. "You ain't much to look at, *you* ain't. He's goin' to Ally, and I'm not to bother 'em. All right; I'll watch, for all that."

During the whole of this time Alice had not stirred. She stood where Grif had left her—her eyes turned towards the house. So fixed and rapt was her attention that her very breathing could scarcely be heard. As the form of the man came nearer and nearer to her, she shrank, and then stretched forth her arms, as if in supplication; but her feet seemed rooted to the spot. He came close to her, and said in a hard, stern voice—

"Is it you who wish to speak with me?"

"Father!" she cried.

"Alice!"

The sudden surprise robbed his voice of its sternness. He recoiled a step from her as she addressed

him, and his face grew pale ; but if the next moment the moon had shone upon it, no trace of emotion would have been there observable.

"So!" he said, coldly. "A trick! Another lesson you did not learn in my house."

She looked down and twisted her fingers nervously, but did not reply.

"Why did you address a note to me in a strange hand?" he asked.

"I thought you would not have come if you recognised my writing," she answered, sadly.

"What do you out at this time of night, and alone?"

"I am not alone, father," she said, glancing to where Grif was crouching.

"What! Is your husband here?" he exclaimed, with suppressed passion, following her look.

"No, sir; it is but a poor lad. I was afraid to come out by myself."

"And your husband?"

"He does not know, sir, that I have come. If he had——"

"He would have kept you away; it would have been wise in him."

"Father, have you no pity?"

"What do you want of me?"

"Help and forgiveness."

"I will give you both. You can come to my home, and I will receive you as my daughter."

"And Richard—my husband——"

"I will have nought to do with him. I give you once again your choice. You are my daughter, or his wife. You cannot and shall not be both. As this is the first, so it shall be the last time I will see you upon the subject. You shall juggle me no more with false writing. The day you ran away from your home, from me who was hoarding and saving for you, I resolved to shut you from my heart as long as you were tied to that scheming scapegrace. You know how constant I can be when I resolve."

"Alas! I know."

"So I have resolved on this, and no power on earth can change me. Richard Handfield came to my house, a guest, and he played the knave. He stopped in my house a servant, and he played the cheat. He took my money, he ate my bread, he displayed his fine gentleman's airs and accomplishments at my expense. And all this time he was stealing you from me, and laughing in his sleeve at the trick he was playing the wealthy squatter. He robbed me of the one object of my life. What!



shall a father toil and scheme for a lifetime, and set his heart upon a thing, and be foiled in a day by a supercilious cheat! What does a child owe a father? Obedience. You owed me that—but a small return for all I had lavished upon you, but a small return for the fortune I was amassing for you. Did I ask you for anything else? What was this for a father to ask a daughter, that she should play the traitress to him?”

“Father, have pity!”

“You have thwarted the scheme of my life. But what was my strongest wish when it clashed with your girlish fancy? Listen. Do you know what I have suffered in this colony? I have suffered privation, hunger, misery, raging thirst, over and over again. I have walked, with blistered feet, hundreds and hundreds of miles; I have laboured with my axe till I was faint with fatigue; I have hidden from Blacks in fear of my life; I have been left for dead upon the burning plains; I have been lost in the bush until my whole being was one great despair! Was this a pleasant life to lead, and did I deserve no recompense? Was life so sweet to me, with those burdens, that I should enjoy it in the then present? I had a child—a daughter. But for her I might have grown into a wild man of the

bush, and growled at the world and at humanity. I had provocation enough, for I was poor. Men who knew me when I first came to the colony, and when I had money, knew me not when I lost it. I lost my wife, too; and I had but my daughter and my poverty left. Then, when men turned their backs to me, and I felt the bitterness of it—I know now that they were right; poverty should be shunned—I bent all my mind and soul to the one desire—to make money. A slice of good fortune fell to my share. I resolved to grow rich, and to make my daughter rich. I toiled, I slaved, I schemed for her. I had an object, and life was less bitter than before. I said, My daughter shall be the envy of those who knew me when I was poor; she shall marry riches, and grow into fashion and into power from the force of her father's and her husband's money. She shall be called the rich squatter's daughter, and her children shall be educated to rule the State. I knew well then, and know well now, the power of gold; it could do all this for me, and more. There is no aristocracy in this colony but the aristocracy of wealth; money is the god all worship here! It ennobles the mean, it dignifies the vulgar. It is all powerful. See what it does for me. What fascinations, what

graces, what virtues, do I possess, that people should cringe to me and adulate me? And as they idolize me, a man of money, for my wealth, so I idolize my wealth for what it brings me."

As he spoke from the vile selfishness of his heart, did the wailing wind, sighing mournfully around him, suggest to his mind no more precious thing in the world than gold? Did the pale stars and the restless waves teach no lesson that such an egotist might learn, and be the better for the learning? Did they tell no story from which he might have learned a noble creed, had he but listened to their teaching? No! he felt not their influence. He lived only in himself. What was Nature to him? She gave him nothing that he should be grateful for; what he received, all others received. And so he beheld the swelling waves, and heard the wailing wind, and looked up to the glimmering stars with indifference. What was the glory of the heavens to him or to his life? A handful of gold and a sightful of stars! Was not the gold which bought him human worship, more precious to him than all?

"Oh, father!" murmured Alice: "money is not everything."

"Money is everything," he replied; "everything

to me. Can you undo, with a word, the study of my life? It was but little I asked in return for the future I was working out for you. The man I selected for you had wealth, position. Even if you had failed (as you *have* failed, but in a different manner) in the duty you owed to me, I could not have forced the man upon you; even although you knew it was the only reward I coveted for my life's labour, and refused at the last moment to give it to me; you might still have been the daughter of my heart, as you are of my blood. But to fly from me to *him*—a penniless adventurer, a shallow, brainless coxcomb!" The thought seemed to cool his passion, and exclaiming, "Why do I waste my time here?" he made a movement towards the house.

"Stop, for pity's sake," Alice cried, stretching forth her arms; "stop and hear me."

"Speak on," he said, between his clenched teeth. There was no hope in his voice; it was hard and bitter.

"I came to-night, sir," Alice said, humbly bowing her head, and forcing back her tears, "to appeal to you for the first and last time. You may send me away, unhappy and broken-hearted—indeed, I am that already—but oh, sir! reflect before

you do so, and let your better feelings guide you. Ah, sir! are all your thoughts about yourself and your money, and have you no thought of me? I do not know a parent's feelings, but soon"—and here her voice faltered—"soon I may become a mother—forgive me, sir, these tears—I try to conquer them, but they are too strong for me." She paused a few moments, and then continued: "What sympathy, sir, could you expect me, a simple girl, to have with your aspirations? I knew them not, and if you had confided them to me, I should not have understood them——"

"Have you come to tutor me, girl?" he asked, coldly.

"No, sir. If my distress and my misery have no weight with you, what can my poor words do? My husband—forgive me—I must speak of him."

"Go on."

"My husband, to whose fate and lot I am linked for ever—for ever," she repeated firmly, "is willing to work for me, is contented to keep me, poor and friendless as I am. But he needs help. Give it him; give it me, and I will trouble you no more. I will be content, so that you assist us to live."

"Your husband is a man," he said; "he can work like other men. Let him do so. He shall not live upon my bounty. No man need starve in this land of plenty. Let him work, if he be not too proud."

"He is not too proud, sir. He has tried to get work, but failed. Help him in his endeavour—you can do so. You have power, influence. And think, sir, that even if I would, I cannot undo the past."

"Would you, if you could?"

"For pity's sake, sir, do not ask me."

"Would you, if you could?" he repeated, relentlessly.

"Then, sir, as you insist," she returned, "I reply, as is my duty, No. He is my husband, and my future life is linked with his."

"Have you done?"

"I have but little more to say, sir. I feel from your voice that there is scant hope for me! But oh, sir, before you turn from me, think of what my future may be if you remain inexorable. You, who have undergone privations in your early life, know what a stern master is necessity. As yet, my husband is saved from crime——"

"Is this your last argument?" he interrupted.

"It has no weight with me. You cannot more disgrace me than you have already done. Here let this end. I *am* inexorable."

His voice, stern and unforgiving, carried conviction with it.

"Heaven help me!" she exclaimed sadly. "Then we must trust to chance." And she turned from him, weeping.

There was a pause, and then he said, "I will not leave you entirely unsatisfied. It is money, I suppose, you want. Here are fifty pounds. It is the last you will ever receive from me while he and you are together. Good night."

She raised her arms, imploringly, but he was making towards the house. He saw not the entreating action, nor did he hear the low wailing sobs which broke from her as he walked away. A sad contrast was her drooping figure upon the lonely sands to the glad life that moved in the merchant's house! A sad accompaniment were her sobs to the strains of music and the sounds of light laughter with which they mingled! The guests within were joyous, while she, who should have been his one joy, stood desolate on the shore. But despite her misery there was hope deep within her heart--hope of a happy future yet with the man

with whose lot hers was linked. Her father had cast her off; but love remained—love strong and abiding. How great the contrast! A good woman's love and a hard man's greed of gold!



## CHAPTER VII.

### GRIF PROMISES TO BE HONEST.

HUNGER has many phases; but in every phase except its physical one it is comparative. Thus, a person may be eagerly desirous, hungry, for something which his neighbour has, but which his neighbour, possessing, does not value and thinks of no regard. What is wanted is a moral, equable dispensation; yet if by any possibility such could be arranged, false weights would be sure to be introduced, and things would be unequal as before. And so the world goes on hungering, and one hungry class groans for that with which the belly of another hungry class is filled. Every step in the ladder of life is thronged with climbers ready to reach the next, and although some be twenty rounds above others, they are as restlessly unhappy in their high position, and as restlessly desirous of getting a foot higher, as those who are so far beneath them. It is the way of the world. The heaven is always

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above us, and we climb, and climb, and climb, and never reach our hopes.

And yet some of our desires are very small. Ambition is various; large-souled aspirations and the meanest of cravings come within its scope. Casually, we admire the aspirations of a noble mind which looks above and beyond the groveling littleness of humanity, and strives to reach a goal where dwell the nobler virtues, studded with the jewels of their worth and goodness. Casually, we pass by, as scarcely worthy of contempt, certainly not worthy of notice, the paltry desires for common things which fill some creatures' souls. Nevertheless, the aspiration which stretches itself towards the nobler virtues may be no finer than the paltry desire which pines for common things. 'Tis ten to one that the latter is more human; and what is human must be good, notwithstanding what some preachers say about the corruption of flesh, and the vanity of desire.

Ask Grif. How paltry, how mean is his ambition! Ask him, in such language as he can understand, what it is he most desires, what it is he most craves for? He will answer, in his own way, Sufficient of the commonest food to eat in the day, and a shelter and blanket to cover him in the night. Is

it his fault that he strives no higher ? His hungry body cries out to him, and he responds to its prompting. He does not openly rebel against his fate. He knows that *it is*, and, without any concerted action of the mind to assist him to that conclusion, he feels that he cannot alter it. He does not repine ; he only wonders sometimes that things are so. Of course, when he is hungry he suffers ; that he cannot help. But he suffers in silence, and thereby shows that he has within him the qualities that would make a hero. But still the fact remains that he aspires no higher ; still the fact remains that he is dead to the conscious exercise of the nobler virtues. Spread them before him, if such were possible, and he would not even wonder. But his eyes would light up, and all his intellectual forces would be gratified, at the sight of a bone with a little meat upon it. Such is Grif, a human waif living in the midst of a grand and mighty civilisation.

Is it possible that this same civilisation, of which we comfortable ones prate and vaunt, depraves as well as ennobles ? The thought is pertinent to the subject. For here is Grif (unquestionably depraved and debased in the eyes of that civilisation which does nothing for him, which absolutely turns its

back upon him), a piece of raw material out of which much good might be wrought, suffering much unmerited suffering, and surrounded by an atmosphere of actively-conscious vice. The law looks unkindly upon him ; policemen push him aside as if he were an interloper in the world ; and well-dressed people gather themselves together to save themselves from contact with him as he slouches by. Civilisation presses upon him unkindly. He does not deserve it. There is a better nature within him than he is called upon to exercise in his intercourse with his enemy, the world. The chord of that better nature has been touched by Alice, so kindly, so commiseratingly, that every nerve in his frame quivers with a passionate longing to serve her. He can reckon on the fingers of one hand the objects for which he has any human affection. Alice he loves far beyond the others, for he feels that she is different to them. He has seen that she is unselfish and self-sacrificing ; and he knows (though he could not express it in so many words) that she is good from principle, and that she is pure because it is her nature to be pure. He has heard her renounce ease and comfort, and choose poverty and suffering, so that she might play the good angel to the man whom she loves. And at the goodness of that renunciation, at the

holiness of it, Grif fell down and worshipped her with all his soul. Then there was Milly: his love for her had no adoration in it, but was born of pity, tenderness, and gratitude. He would do much to serve Milly, for she had been very kind to him. Then came Little Peter. Grif loved that other little waif because he was so helpless, and because it was so sweet to have some one to cherish and take care of. His love for Little Peter had in it something of the love of a mother. He asked for no reward in the shape of gratitude. It was sufficient for him that Peter was dependent upon him—was his to protect. It is truly more blessed to give than to receive!

Counting, then, upon one hand the objects of his love, Grif could mention Alice, Milly, and Little Peter, and still leave a finger unprovided for. A short time since—only two days ago—the dog Rough would have closed the list; but Rough was dead, and the finger might be regarded as widowed. Yes, Rough was dead. Grif's faithful follower, his dumb companion, his honest servant, was gone—poisoned, murdered, meanly killed! Tears, born of rage and desolation, came into Grif's eyes as he thought of the death and the manner of it. But the murderer! Revengeful justice found strong ex-

pression when Grif swore and swore again that he would be even with the villain who had murdered his dog.

It was the second night after the burial, and Grif and Little Peter were sitting upon the ground near the grave. Grif was mourning for his lost friend; if Rough had been his brother he could not have mourned with more genuine grief. The night was chilly, and the wind whistled sharply about the rags in which the boys were clothed. But they were too much engrossed in special cares and griefs to pay more attention to the remorseless wind than was expressed by a cold shiver now and then, and an involuntary huddling together of their limbs. "I wouldn't care if Rough was alive," mused Grif. "If he'd only come when I whistle!" And the next moment he absolutely whistled the old familiar call, and looked down, almost expecting to feel Rough's cold nose rubbing against his hand. Disappointed in this, he looked to Little Peter for sympathy.

He got none. Little Peter's nature was not sympathetic, and Grif obtained no response from Little Peter's eyes or tongue as he placed his hand against the lad's cheek. How thin and pale was that poor little face of poor little Peter's! What weariness of the trouble of living was expressed in the attitude

of his body and in every line of his features! As he sat, drooping, trembling, hollow-cheeked, wistful-eyed, he looked like a shrunk old child-man with every drop of healthful life-blood squeezed clean out of him.

Gazing at the drooping figure, Grif forgot his own grief, and saying "Poor Little Peter!" in a tone of much pity, drew closer to the lad, and sat motionless for many minutes. Then he rose.

"Come along, Peter," he said, "it's time we was off."

But Little Peter did not move.

"Asleep, Peter?" asked Grif.

A slight quivering of Little Peter's body was the only reply.

"Wake up, Peter!" persisted Grif, shaking him gently by the shoulder.

Still Little Peter made no response, but sat quiet, with head drooping to his knees.

Grif knelt quickly upon the ground, and raised Peter's head. The large eyes opened slowly and gazed vacantly at Grif, and then a strong trembling took possession of Peter. His limbs relaxed, and he would have fallen upon his face to the earth had not Grif caught him in his arms. Where he lay, trembling and shivering.

"He's took ill!" cried Grif, with a sudden apprehension. "What shall I do? They won't take him in at the horspital!"

Grif, aware of the necessity of immediate action, lifted Little Peter upon his shoulder. As he did so, and as Little Peter's head sank forward upon Grif's breast, a small stone heart, hanging from a piece of common string, fell from the little fellow's neck. Grif caught it in his hand and held it. Ever since he had known Peter this little stone heart had been round the boy's neck. He would have lost it long ago, had it been of any value; but its worthlessness was its security. So with the stone heart in his hand and Peter upon his shoulder, Grif walked slowly back to the city. Now and then a wayfarer stopped and looked after ragged Grif and his ragged burden. But Grif walked steadily on, taking no notice of curiosity mongers. Once he was stopped by a policeman, who questioned him.

"He's my brother," said Grif, telling the lie without the smallest compunction, "and he's took ill. I'm carryin' of him home."

Carrying of him home! The words caused Grif to reflect and ask himself where he *should* carry Little Peter. The barrel? Clearly, that was not a fit place for the sick lad. He knew what he would



do. He would take Peter to Milly's house. Grif's instincts were nearly always right.

Soon he was in the city, and choosing the quietest streets, he made his way to the quarter where Milly lived. There was a light in her room. He walked slowly up the stairs, and knocked at the door. No answer came. He knocked again, and listened. A sound of soft singing reached his ears, and opening the door, he entered the room and stood still.

Milly was at the further end of the room, kneeling by the side of a bed on which lay a baby asleep. Her hands were clasped, and she was smiling, and singing softly to herself, and looking at the face of her baby, the while she gently swayed her body to and fro. He stood wondering. "I never knowed she had a baby," he muttered inly, under his breath.

Love and devotion were expressed in every curve of the girl's body. The outline of her face, her hair hanging loosely down, the graceful undulations of her figure, were beautiful to look at. She was singing some simple words which might have been sung to her when she was a sinless child, and the good influence of sweet remembrance was upon her, and robed her with tenderness.

"Milly!" whispered Grif.

She turned quickly at the sound, and seeing Grif, cautioned him by signs not to make a noise; and then, after placing her cheek caressingly against her baby's, came towards him.

"What do you want, Grif?" she asked. "Who have you got there?"

"It's Little Peter," said Grif, placing the boy on the ground; "he's took ill, and I don't know what to do."

Milly raised Peter's head to her lap, and bent over him.

"Poor Little Peter!" she said. "How white he is, and how thin! Perhaps he's hungry."

"No," said Grif. "I know what's the matter with him. He caught cold t'other night, when I took him with me to bury my dawg. It was rainin' hard, and we both got soppin' wet. It didn't matter for me, but he was always a pore little chap. I ought to have knowed better."

"To bury your dog!" repeated Milly. "Why, I saw him with you the night before last."

"Yes, Milly, that was when you gave me that shillin'. Rough was all right then. But he was pizened that night."

"Poisoned!"

"Yes."

"Who poisoned him?"

"The Tenderhearted Oysterman."

"The mean hound!"

"He heerd me say somethin' agin him when I was speakin' to you, Milly, so he took it out of me by pizenin' the dawg. But I'll be even with him!"

By this time Milly had undressed Little Peter, and placed him in the bed by the side of her baby.

"There!" she said. "He'll be all right tomorrow. I'll make him some gruel presently. He's got a bad cold, and wants keeping warm."

"You're a good sort, Milly," said Grif, gratefully. "I'd have carried him to the horspital, but I didn't think they'd take him in."

"No; they wouldn't take him there without a ticket, and where could you have got *that* from?"

"Blest if I know!" exclaimed Grif. "Nobody would give *me* a ticket, I shouldn't think!" This remark was made by Grif in a tone sufficiently indicative of his sense of his abasement.

"But I say, Milly," he continued, "I didn't know you had a baby. May I look at him?"

"It's a little girl," said Milly, smiling, leading Grif towards the bed, and turning down the coverlid so that he might get a peep of baby's face. "Isn't she a beauty?"

Grif bent over the bed, and timidly put his hand upon baby's. The little creature involuntarily grasped one of Grif's dirty fingers in her dimpled fist, and held it fast.

"It's like a bit of wax," said Grif, contemplating with much admiration the difference between baby's pretty hand and his own coarse fingers. "Will she always be as nice, Milly?"

"You were like that once, Grif," Milly remarked.

"Was I, though?" he replied, reflectively; "I shouldn't have thought it. How did I come like this, I wonder?"

Here the baby opened her eyes, which had a very wide-awake look in them, as if she had been shamming sleep, and stared at Grif, seriously, as at some object which was really worth studying. To divert her attention from a study so unworthy, Grif smiled at the baby, who, thus encouraged, reflected back his smile with interest, and crowed into the bargain. Whereat Milly caught her in her arms, and pressing her to her breast, covered her face with kisses.

"How old is she, Milly?" asked Grif, regarding this proceeding with honest pleasure.

"Ten weeks the day after to-morrow," replied Milly, who, as is usual with young mothers,

reckoned forward. "And now, Grif, if you will hold her, I will make some gruel for Little Peter. Be careful. No; you mustn't take her like that! Sit down, and I will put her in your lap."

So Grif squatted upon the ground, and Milly placed the child in his lap. He experienced a strange feeling of pleasure at his novel position. It was a new revelation to him, this child of Milly's. Milly herself was so different. He had never seen her in so good a light as now. Hitherto he had in his thoughts drawn a wide line between her and Alice; a gulf that seemed impassable had divided them. Now the gulf was bridged with human love and human tenderness. Alice was all good; but was Milly all bad?

He looked at her as she was making the gruel. Tender thoughts beautify; a mother's love refines. She was kneeling before the fire, pausing in her occupation now and then to bestow a smile upon her child. Once she rested her face in baby's neck, caressingly. Her hair hung upon Grif's hand, and he touched it and marvelled at the contrast between Milly of yesterday and Milly of to-day. Then he fell to wondering more about Milly than he had ever wondered before. Had she a father, like Alice, who was unkind to her? What was it that she saw in

Jim Pizey that made her cling to him? Why was it that everything seemed to be wrong with those persons whom he loved? Rough had been poisoned, Little Peter was ill, Milly was attached to a bad man, and Alice——well, it was a puzzle, the whole of it! While he thus thought, Milly had been giving Little Peter the gruel.

“Milly,” Grif said, when she returned from the bed, “have you got a mother and father?”

The girl turned a startled look upon him, and was about to make some passionate reply, but suddenly checked herself.

“Don’t ask me, Grif,” she said, in a hard voice. “How is your lady?”

Her old spirit was coming upon her. Grif knew that she meant Alice by “your lady,” and he was hurt by the scornful ring of her voice. Seeing that he was grieved, Milly said:

“Don’t mind me, Grif; now I’m soft, and now I’m hard. I’ve got the devil in me sometimes, and I can’t keep him down. But I mustn’t think—I mustn’t think—I mustn’t think. Of course, I’ve got a mother and father, and my mother and father’s got a daughter they might be proud of. Everybody used to tell me so. I had a pretty face, pretty hands, pretty feet, pretty hair. I’m a pretty

daughter altogether ! Why wasn't I ugly ? Then I might have been good ! ”

She took the baby from Grif's arms, and pressed it to her bosom.

“If I knew how to be good,” she said, in a softened voice, “I think I would be. But I don't know how. If I was to go out of this house to-night, I shouldn't know which way to turn to be good. I'd be sure to turn wrong. I don't care ! ” And then she sang, recklessly, “I'm happy, I'm careless, I'm good-natured and free ; and I don't care a single pin what the world thinks of me ! ”

“Don't, Milly ! don't ! ” pleaded Grif, placing his hand upon hers, and looking earnestly at her.

She took his hand convulsively, and put it to her baby's lips.

“That won't do baby any harm,” she said, after a pause. “I wonder if baby will grow up pretty like me. Oh, I hope not, I hope not ! ”

“She's got eyes like your'n,” said Grif, wishing to change her humour.

“Prettier than mine,” Milly replied. “But if it wasn't that I should go mad if I was to lose her, I wish she would die ! It would be better for her, but I think it would be worse for me. What's that in your hand ? ”

It was Little Peter's stone heart, which Grif had held all the while.

"It's Little Peter's heart," he said.

"Of course it is; I remember it now. It belonged to his mother."

"Where is she?" asked Grif, eagerly, for this was the first time he had heard of Little Peter's mother.

"She died two years ago in the hospital."

"Did you know her, Milly?"

"I went with a friend to see her when she was dying. She was a Welsh girl. She put the heart round Little Peter's neck when we took him to wish her good-bye, for the doctor said she would die before night."

"What did she die of, Milly?" The subject was full of interest to Grif.

"Broken heart. Somebody played her false, as usual. I shan't die of a broken heart—not I! Drink will be my death—the sooner the better! Hush! There's Jim. Who else? The Tender-hearted Oysterman."

Grif jumped to his feet, trembling with passion.

"He mustn't see you. He'll do you a mischief. Perhaps he won't stop long. Get under the bed-



clothes, and pretend to be asleep. Quick! For God's sake!"

She thrust him hurriedly into the bed, and had barely time to conceal him and resume her position, before Jim and his companion entered.

Milly smiled at Jim, but neither he nor his companion took heed of her. They seated themselves near the fire, and Milly sat upon the bed, which was in the shadow of the room.

"We must have him," said the Tenderhearted Oysterman, apparently in continuance of a conversation. "The old bloke always keeps a heap of money in his safe at Highlay Station; and Dick Handfield knows every nook and cranny of the place. I've heard him say so. He knows all the secret drawers, too, I'll be bound, and where the keys are to be found, and where the hiding-places are. We must have him, Jim."

At the mention of Highlay Station, Grif pricked up his ears. That was the Station which Alice had spoken of in their conversation a couple of nights ago. But when, the next instant, the Tenderhearted Oysterman uttered Richard Handfield's name, he started, and caught Milly's hand excitedly. Milly pressed him down with quiet, warning action, and, recalled to the necessity of being

cautious, Grif lay still and listened. Milly paid but little attention to the conversation. She did not know anything of Highlay Station, nor that Alice was Richard Handfield's wife, and it was no novelty to her to hear schemes of robbery discussed by Jim and his associates.

"You talk," said Jim Pizey. "But I like to do."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the other.

"Not that you're not cool enough," continued Jim. "You're as good a pal as I ever want to have, if you'd only stop that damned cant of not hurting people." (The Tenderhearted Oysterman gave a quiet chuckle.) "I know well enough that you don't mean it."

"Now, Jim," expostulated the Oysterman, and yet evidently regarding his comrade's words as a compliment. "It's a good job there's no one by to hear you take away my character."

"But others don't know you as well as I do, and there's plenty of 'em would think you were chicken-hearted."

"Do I look like it?" asked the Tenderhearted Oysterman in a tone of villanous humility.

"No, you don't. But you'd make believe that you was. If I didn't know you for one who would stick at nothing—nothing, not even short of ——"

"Never mind what," interrupted the Oysterman, looking at Milly, who was employed nursing her baby, and did not appear to be taking heed of what was said.

"If I didn't know you for that, then, I'd have nothing to do with you, for your infernal cant sickens me. But what I said is that you talk too much. I like to do."

There was a pause in the conversation. Grif still held Milly's hand hard. He felt there was something coming which would affect Alice, and every word that was being uttered stamped itself upon his mind.

"I like to do," resumed Jim. "Dick Handfield we must have, and Dick Handfield we will have. If we can't have him one way, we will another. I've got a hook in him already, and if he hangs on and off as he's been doing, the white-livered skunk! the last two weeks, he'll get a dose that'll pretty well settle him."

"What sort of a dose, Jim?"

"I bought a watch of him this morning—here it is. I gave him five pounds for it. It's a pretty little thing. Just the thing for Milly. Milly!"

"Yes, Jim," answered Milly, disengaging her hand from Grif's grasp, and walking towards Jim,

for fear he should come to the bed, and discover Grif.

"Here's a watch I've bought for you, Milly. It belonged to a lady."

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Milly, her eyes sparkling with eager delight as she looked at the pretty bauble.

"Well, it's yours now, my girl. I promised you should have one when the young 'un came."

"Thank you, Jim," said Milly, returning to the bed, with the present in her hand.

"He's just like me, Milly," said the Tender-hearted Oysterman; "he's as soft as a piece of putty. But I can't see how that watch is a dose, Jim."

"I gave Dick Handfield five pounds for that watch," said Jim, "and I paid him for it with a forged note."

At these words, Milly, who had been looking at the watch, and examining it with the pleasure of a child when it receives a new toy, dropped it upon the bed, with a heavy sigh.

"Then I took him to Old Flick's, and Old Flick gave him five sovereigns for the note. There was a stranger in the store when Dick Handfield changed the note, and Old Flick, who knew all about the lay,

asked Dick Handfield all sorts of questions and regularly confused him. That's a pretty good dose for him, I think. I shall ask him to-morrow for the last time to join us. If he refuses, Old Flick shall give him in charge for passing a forged note, and the man who was in the store at the time will be the witness. Handfield will be glad enough to join us when he finds he's in the web. He'd sooner go up the country with us than go to quod—if it was only for the sake of that woman of his, that white-faced piece of virtue he calls his wife."

"Alice her name is," said the Tenderhearted Oysterman, sneeringly. "She's as much his wife as I am."

"It's a lie, Milly, a lie!" whispered Grif, in an agony of rage and despair at what he had heard. "She *is* his wife!" Oh, if he could get away from the room to tell Alice of the danger which surrounded her husband! He dug his nails in his hand, and his faithful heart beat furiously.

Milly placed her hand upon his lips.

"You're a liar, Oysterman!" she said, quietly. "The girl *is* his wife."

Grif took Milly's hand, and kissed it again and again for the vindication.

The Tenderhearted Oysterman turned sharply

upon Milly, and was about to answer her when Jim Pizey said,—

“Milly’s right. The girl is his wife. You don’t know everything, Oysterman. But now I’ll tell you that that girl is the daughter of Old Nuttall, the rich squatter of Highlay Station. Dick Handfield was living on the Station for a goodish time—that’s how he came to know all about it. The girl fell in love with him, and they ran away and got married.”

“And a pretty nice thing she made of it!” sneered the Oysterman. “I hate these milk-sop women!”

“I wonder what sort of a woman you’d ever be fond of, Oysterman!” said Milly, with a dash of bitter sarcasm in her voice. “I wonder if *you’d* ever get a woman to love you, and think you a model of anything but what’s mean!”

“Serve you right, Oysterman,” said Jim, laughing. “Never you speak against women when a woman is by.”

The Tenderhearted Oysterman had turned white in the face when Milly spoke.

“You’re a nice sort of woman, *you* are,” he exclaimed, with a snarl. “I’d never want *you* to love me and think me a model.”

“A good job for you,” she exclaimed. “I pity

the woman you'd take a fancy to, or the man either, for that matter. If I was Jim, I'd pitch you downstairs."

"Come, come, Milly," said Jim, "we've had enough of that."

"No, we haven't," cried Milly, who was thoroughly roused. "You're a man, you are. You're bad enough, God knows! but there *is* something of a man in you. But that cur!" She placed her baby on the bed, and advanced a step towards the men, and pointed to the Oysterman. "That cur!" she repeated in a tone of such contempt that the Oysterman's blood boiled with fury. "That kicker of women and poisoner of dogs! What do you think he did, the night before last, Jim? He crawled to where poor little Grif was sleeping, and gave a piece of poisoned meat to Grif's dog. He did, the mean hound! That was a nice manly thing to do, wasn't it!"

"Come along, Oysterman," said Jim Pizey, half angry and half amused, taking his comrade by the arm. "It's no use answering her. She talks to me sometimes like that. Come along, and have a drink."

And by sheer strength he forced the Oysterman out of the room.

"That's done me good," said Milly, when the men were gone, taking her baby to the fire.

Grif started to his feet.

"Thank you, Milly," he said. "I'll tell Ally how you stood up for her."

"Don't you do anything of the sort," said Milly, who, now her passion was over, was crying. "It isn't fit that my name should be mentioned to her. She's a good woman."

"And so are you, Milly," said Grif, inwardly struggling with his doubts.

"I'm not, nor ever shall be. That watch" (pointing to it) "was hers, I suppose."

"I s'pose so. I never sor it."

Milly took it in her hand and opened the case.

"Here's her name," she said. "Alice Handfield. And here's a motto: Hope, Faith, and Love. And she gave it back to her husband, because they were hard up, perhaps, and Jim bought it of him with a forged note. Oh, my God! What a web of wickedness and goodness!"

"I must go," cried Grif, "I must go and tell them—I must go and put Ally up to it."

"Up to what!" exclaimed Milly, a light breaking upon her. "Up to the forged note! You'll go and tell her that you heard Jim say he paid for the



watch with a forged note? And her husband 'll have Jim took up, and you'll be witness against him!" She glided swiftly to the door, and turning the key, put it in her pocket.

"What do you do that for?" asked Grif. "I *must* go, Milly. I'll break open the door."

"No, you won't," said Milly, taking fast hold of him. "You shan't get Jim into trouble. He's been kind to me, though he is a bad man, and you shan't peach upon him."

"Let me go, Milly," cried Grif, gently struggling.

"You don't go till Jim comes in," she said, still retaining her hold of him, "and then—Good God!" she cried, in a voice of despair and horror. "Then, he'll kill you!"

The conflict of thought was too much for her. She relaxed her hold, and Grif flew to the door, and broke the frail lock. Then he looked back. Milly had fallen to the floor, and was sobbing convulsively. Her baby was lying by her side.

Grif went to her and raised her.

"Milly," he said, "don't take on so. I won't hurt you or Jim. But I must be true to Ally. If I couldn't be, I'd go and drown myself. I couldn't live, and not be true to her. She said I was her only friend, and I swore that I'd be so till I die!

And I will be, till I die—and I'd like to die for her, for she's a good woman, Milly!"

"She is—she is," groaned Milly; "and I'm a bad and wicked one."

"You're not, Milly, you're not," said Grif, emphatically. "You're good, but another sort of good! See what you've done for Little Peter to-night," and he kissed her hand; "see what you've done for me many and many a time; and see how you stood up for Ally jist now, although every word you said was agin yourself!" he kissed her hand again. "You can't be bad and wicked! And I won't hurt you, and I won't hurt Jim, because of you. I won't, you may believe me! I'll tell Ally that her husband must go away to-night. He *was* agoin' away—I heerd him say so—and perhaps he's gone already. I won't tell her about the forged note. I'll say that I heerd a plot, and I won't tell her what it is. She'll believe me, I know she will. And so I shall do her good, and I shan't do you any harm!"

Grif spoke earnestly, for as his words brought to his mind the remembrance of Milly's unselfish kindness, the conviction that it would be wicked to harm her or wound her feelings, grew stronger and stronger.

"God bless you!" said Milly.

Truly, Grif was not entirely unhappy or forsaken. The blessing, even from Milly, fell upon his heart like dew upon a parched field.

"Ah, if you sor Ally!" Grif continued. "If you knew her! You wouldn't wonder at me then for sayin' I'd like to die for her! Why, do you know what I've heerd her do? I've heerd her refuse to go where she'd have everything she could set her heart upon. I've heerd her refuse it because it wouldn't be right, although lots of women would think it was, and because she means to keep good if she dies for it! She'd make you good, Milly!"

Milly looked at him and laughed hysterically.

"Make me good!" she exclaimed, half-defiantly. "She couldn't, she couldn't! It's too late for that." Then, as Grif rose to go, she said, "You won't say anything about the forged note?"

"No, Milly. Take care of poor Little Peter. If ever I can do you a good turn, I'll do it—you mind if I don't!"

He went to the bed where Little Peter was sleeping. The lad was lying on his side, hot and flushed, with his lips partly open, as if thought were struggling to find expression there. Grif placed his hand tenderly upon Peter's cheek, and then went out of the house.

When he arrived at Alice's lodging he crept up the stairs, and with a settled purpose, which gave intensity to his face, opened the door. Husband and wife were standing, looking into each other's eyes. Tender words had evidently been exchanged, for they stood hand in hand, he with the dawn of a good and strong purpose upon his face, she encouraging him with hopeful, loving speech. A blanket, rolled up, gold-digger fashion, was upon the ground. Grif walked swiftly towards them and asked abruptly,—

“Are you goin' away to-night?”

There was so much earnestness in his manner that with startled looks they asked for his meaning.

“I can't tell you,” he said, in a rapid, sharp tone; “I'm under a promise not to tell. But you *must* go away to-night.”

“We were thinking just now, Grif,” said Alice, “whether it would not be better for him to go in the morning.”

“Make up your mind at once,” said Grif, looking round as if he were fearful of being overheard, “that it won't do to wait here any longer. I've overheard somethin', Ally, and I'm bound down not to tell. If you stop till to-morrow, somethin' dreadful 'll happen.”

"Richard, you must go," said Alice, with gathering alarm, for Grif's impressiveness was filling her with fearful forebodings. "You must go, and at once."

"But why?" asked Richard, fretfully, and regarding Grif as if he were anything but a friend. "Why must I go? Why can't he tell what he knows? What difference will a few hours make?"

"All the difference," said Grif; "in a few hours perhaps you won't be able to go at all, unless——"

"Unless——" repeated Alice, eagerly.

"Unless it's in company with Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman. They've set a trap for you that you won't be able to get out of, if you refuse to join 'em. Don't ask me again to tell you what I've overheard, for I can't—I mustn't—I daren't! I've run all the way here to tell you that there's more and more danger every minute you stop. It'll be all the better for you to go away in the dark."

Weak natures like Richard Handfield's are easily impressed, and more easily impressed with fear, which springs from selfishness, than with any other feeling. Almost without knowing what he was doing, Richard proceeded to sling the blanket round his shoulders. Alice's eager fingers assisted him.

"Grif is right, dearest," she said, "I'm sure he is."

His looks are against him, but he is a faithful friend." Grif nodded his head, and his eyes brightened. "After all, it is but a few hours more. They would soon be past. Bless you, darling! bless you, Richard!" She kissed him again and again, and clung to him, and broke away from him, choosing rather to endure the pain springing from repressed tenderness, than do aught, in word or deed, to weaken him in his purpose.

"Yes, I will go," he said, in a decided tone, and having made up his mind, he took Alice in his arms and held her to him. While thus they clung together, she whispered,—

"Be strong and firm, Richard dear!"

"I will, dearest and best," he said, as with a passionate love clinging he held the good and faithful woman to his breast.

"If the thought that I am true to you, darling—that I am yours in life, and afterwards—that I would share a crust with you and be happy if you were happy—if that thought will strengthen and comfort you, Richard, take it with you, keep it in your mind, for, oh! it is true, my darling, it is true!"

"I know it, Alice, I know it."

"I shall bless you and pray for you every day.

Until we are together again, my eyes can never close without thinking of you. See, Richard, I am not crying." She put his hand to her eyes, which were hot but tearless. "I can send you away with gladness, for it is the beginning of a better time. Though I feel that it is hard to part with you, I can say cheerfully, Go, my dear, for I know that your going is for the good of both of us. Write to me often, and tell me how and where to write to you. Good bye, good bye—Heaven bless and preserve you!"

And she broke from him, and then, meeting his eyes, a look of electric love brought them together again, and once more their arms were twined about each other's neck. Then she glided from his embrace, and sank upon the stool. Richard walked slowly out of the room, his heart filled with love and tenderness, his eyes seeking the ground. It was bitter to part. Even in the agony of separation he found time to murmur at the hardness of his lot which tore him away from the woman who was to him as a saint. As he walked down the stairs, his foot kicked against something. He stooped and picked it up. A stone heart! Indeed, Little Peter's stone heart, which Grif had dropped without knowing it. Richard's nature was superstitious.

The shape of the stone was comforting to him. A heart! It was a good omen. He put it carefully in his pocket, and was about to close the street door when an uncontrollable impulse urged him to look again upon Alice's face. He ran up the stairs into the room. Alice was still sitting upon the stool, her head and arms were resting upon the table; and she was convulsed with outward evidences of a grief she had no longer any motive to conceal.

He spake no word, but kneeling before her, bowed his head in her lap, as a child might have done. She looked at him through her tears, and placed her hands upon his head: in that action were blended the tenderness of a mother to her child and a wife to her husband. He raised his lips to hers; they kissed once more, solemnly, and he went out of the house with her tears upon his face. As he walked along the streets towards the country where was hidden the gold which had tempted thousands to break up happy homes and sever fond ties of affection, the picture of Alice mourning for him, and Grif quiet and sad in the background, was very vivid to his mind. No forewarning of the manner of their next meeting was upon him; if it had been, he would have taken Grif's hand, and kissed it



humbly, penitently, instead of parting from him without a farewell nod.

Left alone with Alice, Grif, with a delicacy of feeling which was in keeping with his general character, was about to retire, when Alice, in a voice broken by emotion, said,—

“Do not go for a minute or two, Grif. I want to speak to you.”

Grif gave a nod of acquiescence, and sat upon the floor, patiently.

Presently Alice dried her eyes and beckoned him to come closer to her.

“Grif,” she said, in a sweet voice. “Why are you not honest?”

Now, Grif knew perfectly well the meaning of honesty—that is to say, he knew the meaning of the word literally. To be honest, one must not take what belongs to other people. Well, he was not honest; he had often taken what did not belong to him. But he was not a systematic thief; what he had stolen he had stolen from necessity. And he had never stolen anything but food, and then only when hunger sharply pressed him. The thought flew swiftly to his mind that if he had not taken food when he wanted it, he must have starved.

Was that right? No, he was sure it was not. Little as he knew about it, he was sure he was not sent into the world to starve. But he must have starved if he had not taken what belonged to other people! Clearly, then, it was not wrong to steal. Grif's mind was essentially logical, as may be seen from the process of thought which occupied it directly after Alice asked him the question. And yet if he were right, Alice was wrong. Could she be wrong? Could the woman who was to him the perfection of women, the embodiment of all that was pure and noble—could she be wrong? Here came the doubt whether it would not have been the proper thing to have starved, and not stolen. "There'd have been an end of it, at all events," he muttered to himself, when his musings reached this point. After which he grew perplexed, and the logical sequence of his thoughts became entangled. He did not blame Alice for asking the question; but, for all that, he bit his lip and looked imploringly at her.

"You have been so good a friend to me and Richard," she said, "that it pains me to see you as you are. I would like to see you better, for your sake and for mine, Grif."

"I never know'd how to be honest, Ally," he

said. Then he thought of Milly's words to him that night. "If I knew how to be good," she had said, "I think I would be. But I don't know how." That was just the case with him. He did not know how to be honest. And yet he had told Milly that Alice could make her good. Perhaps Alice could make him honest. Not that he cared particularly about being honest, but he would like to please Alice. "I don't want not to be honest," he said; "all I wants is my grub and a blanket."

"And those, Grif," she said, gently, yet firmly, "you can earn if you like."

"Can I? I'd like to know how, Ally?"

"You must work for them."

"Yes, that's all right. I'm willin' enough to work. I'd go out this minute to work, if I had it to do. But I couldn't get no work—a pore beggar like me! I don't know nothin', that's one thing. And then, if I get a 'orse to mind, the peelers take it from me and tell me to cut off. I tried to git papers to sell, and I did one day; but some of the other boys told the paper man I was a thief, and when I went for more papers the next mornin' he wouldn't give 'em to me. I've got a precious bad character, Ally, there's no mistake about that; and

I've been to quod a good many times. I can't look a peeler in the face, upon my soul I can't!"

Grif did not make this last remark in a humorous manner; he made it reflectively. It really was a fact, and he stated it seriously.

But Alice was not convinced.

"You're willing to work," she said.

"Yes, I'm willin' enough."

"Every one can get work if he likes, and if he tries."

Grif looked dubious. His knowledge of the world was superior to hers. He had battled with it and fought with it since he was a baby. "She don't know what a bad lot we are," he thought. But he was sincerely desirous to please her.

"What do you want me to do, Ally?" he asked.

"I want you to give me a promise to be honest, Grif," she said, earnestly.

"I'll do it," he replied, without a moment's hesitation. And then he added seriously, for he felt he was undertaking a great responsibility, "I'll be honest, Ally, whatever comes of it."

"And if ever you want anything to eat and can't earn it, Grif, you will come to me."

"Yes, I'll come to you, Ally," he said, almost crying, for he knew how poor she was.

"Suppose now, to-morrow morning you go into

all the shops and ask] if they want an errand boy. That does not require any learning, Grif."

"No, I could do that all right; I can run fast, too. But you'll see, Ally; it'll be no go."

"You'll try, Grif, will you not?"

"I'll try, Ally."

"This is the last night I shall be here. I am going to other lodgings to-morrow, and shall remain there until my husband writes for me. Perhaps he will write for me to join him on the diggings; if he does, and you fail in getting work, you shall come with me, Grif."

He stood before her, mute and grateful. She wrote an address on a piece of paper. "This is where I am going to live," she said, giving it to him. He took it, and seeing that she was weary, bade her good night.

"Good night, Grif, my good boy. I am very grateful for the service you have done us this night."

"You've got no call to be grateful to me, Ally," said Grif. "Only let me be your friend, as you said I was, and I don't want no more."

Outside the door, Grif considered where he should sleep. He did not care to go to the barrel, for it would be so lonely there without Little Peter. It

had been Grif's chronic condition, before he took possession of the barrel, never to know in the morning where he was going to sleep at night. It all depended upon where he found himself when he made up his mind to retire to rest. Knowing there was a cellar to the house, he groped his way down to it.

"I wish I had a match," he muttered, when he was at the bottom of the stairs. "There was a empty packin'-case somewhere about; I remember seein' it. Oh, here it is; it's hardly long enough, but I can double myself up;" thus soliloquising, he crept into it. "Now then," he said, as he lifted the cover of the packing-case on the top, popping his head down quickly to avoid a bump; "that's warm and comfortable, that is. It'd be warmer, though, if I had Rough here, or Little Peter. Wouldn't it be jolly! I'm honest now," he thought, recurring to his promise, as he closed his eyes. "I'm honest now, that's what I am. I ain't a-goin' to crib no more pies or trotters. It's a rum go, and no mistake!"

And Grif fell asleep, and dreamt that all the pigs and trotters he had pilfered were transformed into little hobgoblins, and were holding a jubilee because he had turned honest!

## CHAPTER VIII.


### GRIF IS SET UP IN LIFE AS A MORAL SHOEBLACK.

GRIF, although but a poor and humble member of the human family, was as gregariously inclined as the rest of his species, and loved, when opportunity offered, to associate with his fellows. The circumstance of birth had placed him upon the lowest rung of the social ladder, and being groveling by nature, he had no thought of striving upwards, and was always prowling about, like a hungry dog searching for a bone. Being gregariously inclined, he was to be depended upon as an item in a mob. The object of a gathering of people was not a thing to be considered—politics, religion, amusement, were all one to him. If he but chanced to come across a throng, he added one more to the number, from sheer force of habit. Thus, he was a passive auditor of street preachers of every denomination, and, being in the habit of standing quite still, with his mouth open and his hands in his

pockets, or where his pockets ought to be, he grew to be looked upon as a godsend by the orators, who spoke at him, and scoffed at him, and humbled him, and hurled anathemas at his head, as representing a class entirely devoid of godliness. They twisted his moral nature, and picked at it, and pulled it to pieces, and grew eloquent upon it. They said—Look at his rags, look at his dirt, look at the ignorance written on his countenance. They told him to repent if he wished to be saved from damnation ; and they prayed for him and wept for him so earnestly, that sometimes he experienced a dull wonder that the earth did not open and swallow him, he felt so utterly and thoroughly bad. To the political orators who were in the habit of “stumping-it” in the Market-square he was not of so much importance. “The People” in the aggregate was what the stump politicians gnashed their teeth at and wept over ; and it was remarkable to observe with what complacency the People listened to these bemoanings. At the period during which Grif played his insignificant part in the history of the gold-colony, working-men-politicians were in great force, and night after night the Market-square would be thronged with an auditory not unwilling to be amused by listening to the outpourings of half-



crazy or wholly - knavish demagogues, who had either gone mad over "the people's wrongs," or were working to get into the Parliament, where they could make "pickings" for themselves. Many a red-hot radical who could not get an audience in Great Britain, and who had emigrated to what he thought was to be "the people's paradise" here was listened to, and laughed at, and applauded, and—— did no harm after all. Grif did not understand what it all meant. He heard a great deal about the ground-down people, the crushed people, the poor starving people, upon whose substance the oligarchs were fattening; but all he could make out was that things were wrong altogether, a conclusion which precisely tallied with his own experience. But he, for one, bore his lot uncomplainingly, and, with an unconscious exercise of philosophy, walked in the gutters (not feeling himself good enough to indulge in the pavement) without a murmur. Grif did not object to gutters; he had formed their acquaintance in his earliest infancy, and time and association had almost endeared them to him. Everything in the world is comparative; pleasure, pain, success, disappointment, act in different ways upon different people: the effect depends upon constitution and education. So, dirt and cleanliness



are differently regarded by different classes of society. To a well-regulated mind the spectacle of Grif walking in a narrow street, and picking his steps carefully along the gutter, would have caused a sensation of wondering disgust; and a pair of well-polished wellington boots might naturally have objected to come into contact with the dirty broken bluchers in which Grif's feet slip-slopped constantly. But, in the eyes of Grif, dirty boots were no disgrace; he felt not the shame of them. From the moment he came into possession of a second-hand pair (he had never known the respectable bliss of a new tight-fitting boot, pressing on corn or bunion), they were dragged down to his own level, and forfeited their position in society. They may have been occasionally scraped, but they were never polished; and so they lost their respectability, and became depraved and degraded, and their seams and soles were eaten into with mud and dirt, until they gave up the ghost in the boot world, and trod the earth no more.

It might be gathered from Grif's mutterings, as he walked along the streets the day after he had given Alice the promise to be honest, that his mind was disturbed. "She's right, o' course she is," he said, "I know that well enough; but what was I to

do? I know it'll be no go my tryin'. He must be a precious green cove who'd have anythin' to do with me!" and he looked down upon his boots, not with disgust, but with distrust, and stepped out of the gutter on to the pavement. "I never wanted to steal; I only wanted my grub and a blanket. If any swell 'd have given 'em to me, it 'd have been all right. But they ain't a bit of use to any one, ain't the swells. I've got to try to get a billet as a errand boy. All right. It ain't a bit of good, I know. Every one on 'em knows what sort of a cove I am. But I'll try, at all events. I promised her I would, and I ain't agoin' to deceive her!"

And thus it fell out that Grif had issued from his last night's bed, the packing-case, with the intention, for the first time in his life, of endeavouring to obtain an honest livelihood.

But Grif did not seem destined to be successful. He walked into scores of shops and places of business with the timid yet half defiant inquiry, "Do you want a errand boy?" and was sometimes roughly, often ignominiously, turned out. Scarcely from one of the storekeepers did he obtain a kind word, and it was not in his favour that many of them knew him, and had been in the habit of seeing him prowling about the Melbourne streets. He was

not a savoury-looking boy, and did not bear upon his outward appearance any recommendation to the situation he was soliciting. His boots were muddy, his clothes were ragged, his skin was dirty, his hair was matted. He did not add another word to the query, "Do you want a errand boy?" and he did not at all take it in bad part that he was treated with contumely. Indeed, if such a state of mind can be conceived, he was absolutely exultant at each rebuff. "I told her so," he muttered to himself, triumphantly; "who'd have anythin' to do with a beggar like me? But I promised her I'd try, and I ain't agoin' to deceive her." Two or three times he was surlily spoken to by the policemen, and on each occasion he slunk off, without a murmur, not without a dim consciousness that he was absolutely compromising his character by attempting to obtain an honest livelihood. Readers who are not acquainted with colonial life, must not suppose that the police, or that other "institutions," differ in any essential in the colonies from those of the older countries. The colonies are certainly new, but they do not commence their career at the year One, but at the year Eighteen Hundred and Odd. There is just about the same comparative amount of vice and virtue, goodness and wickedness, ruffianism and

kind-heartedness, as is to be met with in any other part of the world. Those who say otherwise, and cause others to think otherwise, are in the wrong. There are in the colonies, just as much average unkindness and uncharitableness, just as much charity and benevolence, just as much ignorance, just as much noble-mindedness, as can be found amongst masses of human creatures anywhere. It is true that men get into false positions oftener than in older countries, but that is scarcely to be wondered at in new colonies where people of all classes are thrown indiscriminately together, and have not had time to settle into their proper positions. Those readers will therefore please not to wonder that Grif should be looked upon in precisely the same light as he would be looked upon if he were prowling about London streets. To the Melbourne constable, he was just what a ragged pilfering boy would be to a London constable. It did not much affect him. He was accustomed to be buffeted, and cuffed, and maltreated. The world had given him nothing but hard knocks since his birth, and he took them without murmuring. He looked upon it quite as a matter of course when the conservators of public peace spoke harshly to him. But he had a promise to perform ; and he resolved to perform it

conscientiously. So it happened that he stood at the door of the great place of business of Mr. Zachariah Blemish, with the intention of asking for the situation of an errand boy. The green baize folding doors somewhat daunted him; but, hesitating for one moment only, he pushed them open and entered. It chanced that, exactly upon his entrance, Zachariah Blemish came out of his own particular private room for the purpose of putting a question to one of his clerks, and that the great Blemish and the small Grif stood face to face. It was a marvellous contrast! The great Blemish, sleek and shining; the small Grif, rough and muddy: the great Blemish clean and polished, smooth-shaved and glossy; the small Grif, dirty and ragged, with the incipient stubble of manhood upon his chin and cheeks. For Nature is impartial in her supply of beard and whiskers. Money will not buy them, nor will grease produce them, though it be puffed and perfumed.

The rich, great Blemish, then, looked down upon the poor little Grif. For a moment, the great man's breath was taken away at the sight. In his counting-house, sanctified by the visits of Members of Parliament, of Ministers, and of merchants of the highest standing—in sight of his books, wherein

were daily entered records of transactions amounting to thousands of pounds—the appearance of a ragged boy, and such a ragged boy, was, to speak of it in the mildest terms, an anomaly.

“What do you want here?” asked Blemish.

“Do you want a errand boy?” asked Grif, in return.

“A what?” inquired Blemish, sharply.

“A errand boy,” replied Grif, calmly.

At this juncture, a policeman, who had watched Grif enter the office, and who was sycophantishly disposed to protect the interests of wealth and position, popped his head in at the door, and touching his hat, begged Mr. Blemish’s pardon, but the boy was a thief, and he thought he was up to no good.

“Umph!” said Mr. Blemish. “He looks like it. But thank you, policeman,” this with a stately affability, “I do not think you will be wanted.”

Whereupon the policeman touched his hat again, and vanished, determining, however, to keep an eye upon Grif, and find out what he was up to.

“Come this way,” said Mr. Blemish to Grif, who, considerably astonished that he had not been given into custody, followed the great man into his private room. There he found himself in the presence of two other gentlemen, Mr. Matthew Nuttall, and Mr.

David Dibbs. Mr. Nuttall was sitting at a table, writing, and his face was hidden from Grif. "Now, then," said Mr. Blemish, when Grif had disposed himself before the great merchant like a criminal; "what do you mean by coming into my place of business?"

"I wants a sitiuation as a errand boy," immediately replied Grif.

"The policeman says you are a thief," interrogated Mr. Blemish; "what do you say to that?"

"Nothin'," replied Grif, shortly.

"You *are* a thief, then?"

"No, I ain't," said Grif: "I'm honest now," and he blushed with shame as he made the confession.

"Oh, you are honest now," Mr. Blemish observed, with a slight dash of sarcasm. "Since when has that occurred?"

"Since this mornin'; this is my first day at it."

Grif's candid statement appeared to perplex the great merchant. He paused a little before he said,—

"You *were* a thief, then?"

"When I couldn't get nothin' to eat for nothin', I took it," returned Grif, uncompromisingly; "I wasn't a-goin' to starve."

"Starve!" exclaimed Mr. Blemish, lifting up his



hands in pious wonderment. "Starve! In this land of plenty!"

"It ain't a land of plenty to me; I wish it was."

"Really," observed Mr. Blemish, to surrounding space, "the unblushing manner in which such ragamuffins as this give the lie to political economists is positively frightful. Do you believe in statistics, boy?"

"Not as I knows on," said Grif.

"Did you expect a situation here?" inquired Mr. Blemish, looking down upon the lad, as if wondering what business he had in the world.

"No."

"Why did you come, then?"

"I promised her to try, though I told her it wasn't a bit o' good."

"Who is 'her'?" inquired Mr. Matthew Nuttall, turning suddenly round, and facing Grif.

Grif gave a great start, and threw a sudden sharp look at the questioner's face. He knew him at once. The likeness was unmistakeable. Even in his deep voice there was a ring of Alice's sweeter tones. If anything could have shaken Grif, it was the sight of that stern face, and the knowledge that the man before him could make Alice happy if he chose. Eager words rushed to Grif's lips, but he dared

not give them utterance. What good could a ragamuffin like him do? He had best hold his tongue, or he would make matters worse.

"Who is 'her'?" repeated the gentleman.

"She's a lady, that's what she is," replied Grif, recovering his composure.

"A lady!" and Mr. Nuttall laughed.

"Ah, if you knew!" thought Grif, but he contented himself with saying, "Yes, she is, and so you'd say if you sor her."

"Upon my word," remarked Mr. Blemish, blandly, "I did not know that vagabonds like you associated with ladies. This boy is evidently an original."

"Don't you call no names," said Grif. "If you don't want a errand boy, say so, and send me away."

"Better and better," observed Mr. Blemish, composedly. "Now, this is something in my way, although I am not aware that I have met with such a character before to-day. Why did you start when this gentleman spoke to you?"

"I thort I knew his voice," returned Grif.

"And do you know it? Have you had the pleasure of this gentleman's acquaintance?" this said so pleasantly that both the gentlemen smiled.

"Never seed the gentleman afore, as I knows on,"

said Grif, to whom a lie was of the very smallest consequence.

"What do you do for a living?" asked Mr. Blemish.

"Nothin' partikeler."

"And you find it very hard work, I have no doubt," observed Mr. Blemish.

"Yes, I do; very hard," replied Grif, literally; and then, with sudden exasperation, he exclaimed, "What's the use of badgerin' me? You ain't agoin' to do nothin' for me. Why don't you let me go?"

"Come," said Mr. David Dibbs, who up to this time had taken no part in the dialogue, "I tell you what it is, young feller! You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll commit you on the spot. I'm a magistrate, that's what I am, and I'll give you a month as sure as eggs is eggs, if you don't mind what you're up to!"

"I don't care," responded Grif. "I ain't a-goin' to be badgered."

"You don't care!" exclaimed Mr. David Dibbs, turning as red as a turkey-cock. "Send for the policeman, Blemish. I'll have him put in jail, and flogged. Is a magistrate to be sauced at in this here way?"

The small puffed-up soul of Mr. David Dibbs

swelled with indignation. They were come to a pretty pass, indeed, when the possessor of thirty thousand pounds a-year, and a magistrate into the bargain, was thus openly defied by a ragged boy, probably without sixpence in his pockets! They glared at each other, did Grif and Mr. David Dibbs, and Mr. Dibbs did not have much the best of the situation.

"Nay, nay, Mr. Dibbs," said Mr. Blemish, soothingly; "you have every right to be angry, but let me deal with the boy, I beg.—Now, suppose," he said, addressing Grif, impressively, "suppose I were to take it into my head (I haven't any such idea, mind you) to give you a situation as errand boy, what remuneration would you require in return?"

"What what?"

"What remuneration—what salary—how much a week would you expect?"

"I don't expect nothin' a week," answered Grif; "I only wants my grub and a blanket. But if you ain't got no such idea, what's the good of keeping me here?"

"Of course you know nothing of religion?"

"I've been preached to," responded Grif, "till I'm sick of it."

"This boy interests me," remarked Mr. Blemish, speaking to society in general; "I should like to make an experiment with him. Who knows but that we might save his soul?"

"You can't do that," said Grif, moodily.

"Can't save your soul!"

"No; the preacher chap sed it'd go to morchel perdition; and I s'pose he knows."

Mr. Blemish raised his eyes to the ceiling, and an expression of sublime pity stole over his countenance. Grif edged closer to the door, as if anxious to be dismissed.

Mr. Blemish folded his hands with a sort of pious horror, and exclaimed—"I am amazed!"

"What are you amazed at?" inquired Mr. David Dibbs. "I've seen hundreds of boys like this here one—he ain't no different to the rest. They're a bad, vicious lot."

Grif assented to the last remark by a nod.

"But our duty is clear," said Mr. Blemish, as if in answer to a voice within him, perhaps the voice of morality. "Listen to me"—this to Grif, with a forefinger warningly held up; "I am about to give you a chance of reforming."

"All right; I'm agreeable," said Grif, in a tone that betokened utter indifference of the matter.

"In my capacity as President of the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory, I will provide you with a boot stand, a set of brushes, and a pot of the best blacking. You can polish boots?"

"I've only got to rub at 'em, I s'pose," said Grif, wishing his own feet, with their dirty bluchers, would fly off his legs.

Mr. Blemish waived the question as one of detail, which it was evidently beneath him to enter upon.

"You can take up your stand at once. What do you say? Are you willing to be honest?"

"Didn't I tell you that this is my first day at it," replied Grif. "I'm willin' enough; I only wants my grub and a blanket. It don't matter to me how I gets 'em, so long as I do get 'em."

"Very well," and Mr. Blemish touched the bell, which on the instant brought a clerk, to whom he gave instructions. "Go with this young man, and he will provide you with everything that is necessary, and come to-night to the meeting of the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory? Do you know why it is called the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory?"

"No."

"Because all the boys are moral. If they

are not moral when they are admitted, they are made moral. So mind that you're moral. The more moral you are, the better you will get on."

"I'll be very moral, I will," promised Grif, without the slightest idea of the meaning of his promise.

"Now you can go; I shall keep my eye on you, and watch how you conduct yourself;" and Mr. Blemish straightened himself, and swelled and puffed, as who should say, "I have done a noble and a moral action, and now I can transact my business with an easy conscience."

Grif, finding himself set up in life as a moral shoeblack, felt uncomfortably strange as he stood behind his stand in one of the Melbourne streets. He had been provided with a bootstand, a set of brushes, and a pot of the best blacking; and as he surveyed his stock in trade, he was not quite certain whether he ought to be gratified or disgusted. He was so awkward altogether; and he did not know what to do with his hands. He placed them behind him—that was not business-like; he let them hang before him, and he became so painfully conscious of them, that he absolutely began to hate them. Never until now had he experienced what a

dreadful responsibility it was to have two hands and not know what to do with them.

For an hour no customer came. Thinking that the state of his own boots was not a recommendation to business, he set to work brushing and polishing them up. It is amazing what a difference a well-polished pair of boots makes in one's appearance. As he surveyed his shining leathers, Grif felt that an important change had taken place in his prospects. He was already a respectable member of society. But still no customer came. He was a shrewd lad, and, thinking to tempt the passers-by, he took off his boots and placing them upon his stand, courted custom with bare feet. In vain. Most of those who passed took no heed of him; a few looked at him and smiled—some in pity, some in derision. It was like standing in the pillory. He turned hot and cold, and flushed and paled, by turns. In truth, it was no enviable task for Grif, who had been a Bedouin of the byeways all his life, to stand stock-still, as if proclaiming that he was ashamed of his past life, and begged to be admitted into the ranks of honest respectability. Besides, he was hungry, and gnawing sensations within made him restless and unhappy. But Grif behaved bravely. He did not flinch from his post. For



hours he stood, patiently waiting. And then an incident occurred. Two men, Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman, stopped before him. The sight of the Oysterman so inflamed Grif, that he felt inclined to do one of two things—to catch up his boots and fly away, or to spring upon the Oysterman and choke him for murdering Rough. But he did neither.

“Here’s the young imp,” said Jim Pizey; “he’s turned respectable.” Grif’s first impulse was to indignantly deny the imputation, but no time for utterance was given him. “Have you seen Dick Handfield to-day?” asked Pizey.

“No,” answered Grif, shortly.

“Where have they gone to, him and his wife!” asked Jim. “Tell me any lies, and I’ll break your neck for you. Here, clean my boots.” Jim bade him do this, for he was fearful of attracting attention.

Grif would have liked to refuse; but he felt that to do so would be a clear infraction of his promise to Alice.

“How should I know where they are?” exclaimed Grif, brushing at Jim’s boots.

“You were there last night, and they were there last night. You and the girl have been together

lots of times, and you know well enough where they're gone to. You're a pet of hers, I'm told."

"She's been very good to me, Ally has," said Grif, gently. "And because o' that, you don't think I'd let on where they are, do you? You don't think I'd let on, if I knew, do you? No, I'd have my tongue cut out first."

"I'll tear it out and pitch it down your throat, if you talk to us like that," said the Oysterman, fiercely.

"Will you?" said Grif standing up. "Or you'll pizen me, the same as you pizened my dawg! You'd like to, wouldn't you? And because o' that, if I didn't have no other reason, I wouldn't tell you where Dick Handfield is, if I knew where you could put your hands on him this minute. There!"

"You won't tell us?" asked Jim.

"No," answered Grif, bravely.

Jim looked darkly at him, and giving the stand a kick, sent the blacking-bottle, the brushes, and Grif's boots, rolling in the gutter; and, while Grif was busy picking them up, he took his companion's arm, and walked away.

This was not an encouraging beginning to Grif's honest career, and dark doubts entered his mind

as to whether he really had made a change for the better.

"What's the use of bein' moral," he grumbled, as he rearranged his stand, "if this is the way I'm to be served? They've soon found out that Dick Handfield's gone; and ain't they mad at it, neither! It's a good job he went away to-day. Old Flick will be mad, too, at buyin' the bad note. It's a reg'lar game, that's what it is. I'm precious hungry. I wish I was near the confectioner's. I'd go and arks for a pie. But I'll see it out. I promised Ally I would, and I will. Hallo! what do *you* want?"

This was addressed to a boy, if possible dirtier and more ragged than Grif himself. Indeed, dirt and this boy had become so inseparable that he was known by the simple but expressive name of Dirty Bob. Now, Dirty Bob had seen Grif take up his stand, and had disdainfully watched him wait for customers. In Dirty Bob's eyes Grif was a renegade, a sneak, for setting up as a shoeblack. And he determined to show his disdain in his own particular way. He possessed only one sixpence in the world, and he had resolved to spend it luxuriously.

"Oh, it's you, Dirty Bob, is it!" said Grif.

"Yes, it's me," responded Dirty Bob, loftily.

"What do you want?" asked Grif.

"What do I want?" echoed Dirty Bob. "Why, you're a bootblack, ain't you?"

"Yes," replied Grif, with dignity. "I'm a moral shoeblack now."

"Ho! crikey!" exclaimed Dirty Bob. "What do you call yourself?"

"I'm a moral shoeblack," repeated Grif, with an inclination to punch Dirty Bob's head.

"'Ere's a go!" cried Dirty Bob. "A moral shoeblack, are you? Well, then, clean my boots, and mind you clean 'em morally;" and he flopped upon the stand a foot encased in a boot in the very last stage of decay.

In Grif's eyes this was a humiliation, and he almost quite made up his mind to pitch into Dirty Bob; but the thought that by so doing he might injure his character as a moral shoeblack, restrained him.

"Now, then," exclaimed Dirty Bob; "what are you waiting for? Clean my boots, d'ye hear! What are you blockin' up the street for if you won't clean a genelman's boots when you're told?"

"Where's your tanner?" asked Grif, gloomily.

"'Ere it is," replied Dirty Bob, producing it. "It's a good un. It's the only one I've got, but I'm

goin' to spend it 'spectably and genteelly. Brush away."

After a little uncomfortable communing, Grif spat upon his brush, and commenced to rub, submitting silently to the scornful observations of Dirty Bob.

"I say, sir," observed Dirty Bob (and be it remarked that the "sir" was a nettle which stung Grif sharply); "I say, sir, do you want a 'prentice?"

"I don't want none of your cheek," said Grif, rubbing so smartly that he almost rubbed off the upper leather; "that's what I don't want. So you'd better hold your jaw."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Dirty Bob, meekly; "I forgot that I was speakin' to one of the Hupper Class. And ho! sir!" he exclaimed, in a tone of anguish. "Don't tell the perlice, or they'd put me in quod for cheekin' a moral shoe-black."

"There; your boots are done!" ejaculated the disgusted Grif. "Where's the tanner?"

"Don't you think, sir," said Dirty Bob, surveying his boots critically, "that one on 'em is a little more polished than t'other. Would you please make 'em even, and give this cove another rub?"

Grif commenced again rubbing viciously.

"Ho! don't rub so 'ard, sir!" exclaimed Dirty

Bob. "I was brought up very tender, I was, and I've got a wopping corn on my big toe. Thankey, sir! 'Ere's the tanner, and when you're Lord Mayor, don't forget Dirty Bob!"

And he walked off, whistling. It was late in the day now, so Grif prepared to close business. His heart was not very light, for the first sixpence he had honestly earned in his life had been earned with a sense of bitter humiliation.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BANQUET IS GIVEN TO THE MORAL MERCHANT.

THE world is full of shams. As civilisation advances, shams increase and multiply; indeed, they multiply so fast that human nature in the nineteenth century might be likened to a pie, with very little room inside for the fruit, so thick is the crust of shams with which it is overlaid. And as a chief lieutenant of shams—as a sham which takes precedence of a host of other shams, from its very shamelessness, may be ranked the toast of Our Guest, or Our Host, proposed at public dinners and entertainments. The unblushing fibs told in the speeches are dreadful to contemplate. Surely, some day a fearful retribution will fall upon that man who is in the habit of rising when the dessert is on the table, and endowing Messrs. Smith, Brown, Jones, and Robinson with every virtue under the sun, and who unctuously dilates upon their sublimities, their virtues, and their goodnesses. Beware! thou weak

and false platitudinarian ! Think not to escape thy fate, because the word which describes thee is not to be found in the dictionary. Beware ! and reform thy evil courses ere it be too late !

It is not to be supposed that any such thoughts as these entered the mind of Mr. Zachariah Blemish, as he sat on the right hand of the chairman at a grand public dinner given in his (Blemish's) honour. For public enthusiasm with regard to this great and good man had risen to a very high pitch—to such a pitch indeed, that it was resolved to give Mr. Zachariah Blemish a banquet ; and, all the preliminaries being arranged, more than two hundred gentlemen, representing wealth and position, sat down, and ate and guzzled to do him honour. The guest himself ate sparingly, but Mr. David Dibbs made up for him. Mr. Dibbs had but few articles of faith, and to eat as much as he could was one of them. If it had not been that his gold threw a glare of sanctity around him, Mr. Dibbs would have been looked upon as a glutton. As it was, what would have been a vice in a poorer man, was in him nothing but an amiable eccentricity. The company was composed of very influential atoms : politics, religion, and L.S.D. were largely represented, the latter especially. The Honourable Mr. Peter Puff

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was in the Chair ; another Honourable undertook the Vice ; and a Bishop said grace before meat. It was curious to note the conduct of the guest in whose honour the entertainment was given. He appeared to be quite oblivious of the occasion, and but for a shade of self-consciousness which now and then passed across his face, he might have been regarded as a perfectly disinterested observer. The committee would have been justified in regarding this conduct as somewhat ungrateful, for they had been indefatigable in their exertions. Fish of river and sea, game of forest, fruit of hothouse, were cunningly served up in every possible variety in honour of Blemish. For long weeks, celebrated cooks had ransacked their brains to invent new dishes, and every one admitted, when the dessert was laid, and the wine was passing, that the result produced was glorious, and worthy of the occasion.

Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—rattle! Gentlemen, Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen! Proposed with patriotic enthusiasm. The Queen! Each gentleman, standing, drains his glass, and sits down again with becoming solemnity. Buzz of conversation. Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—rattle! Gentlemen, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and the rest of the Royal

Family; and may he and they, etc., etc., etc. Enthusiasm and general geniality. Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—rattle! Gentlemen, His Excellency the Governor! With appropriate flunkeyism. As Her Most Gracious Majesty's Representative—most important and flourishing portion of Her Most Gracious Majesty's dominions—upon which the sun never sets—and so on, and so on; with The Army and Navy, The Clergy, etc., until the important moment arrives when the toast of the evening is to be proposed.

"Gentlemen, are your glasses charged?"

"All charged in the East," responds an indiscreet Freemason, and then there is a shifting and shuffling, until the Honourable Mr. Peter Puff rises. He looks round upon the guests, blows his nose, lifts his glass, puts it down again, coughs, and proceeds to speak.

"Gentlemen, it is now my proud task to perform a duty, which is no less a duty than it is a pleasure. (Hear, hear.) I wish that it had fallen to the lot of some more eloquent speaker than myself—(No, no!)—to propose the toast of the evening; but being asked to preside on this memorable occasion, I felt that I should have been wanting in respect to myself, and in respect to the gentleman who

sits upon my right hand, if I had not at once joyfully and gratefully accepted the honourable position. Gentlemen, some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. (Considerable doubt here intrudes itself into the minds of fifty per cent. of the guests, whether this is an original observation or a quotation.) Gentlemen, I have, in this instance, had greatness thrust upon me; for no one can doubt that the devolvment upon me to propose the toast I am about to propose, reflects honour and greatness upon—upon the proposer. We have amongst us this evening, a gentleman—(here every one looks at Mr. Zachariah Blemish, who looks up to the ceiling, as if he considers it likely that the gentleman about to be referred to may be discovered somewhere in that locality)—a gentleman whose undeviating rectitude, whose integrity, whose moral character, whose wealth, whose position, are not only creditable and honourable to himself, but creditable and honourable to the city which he has made his dwelling-place. (Hear, hear.) We might say, with Hamlet, that in this gentleman (in a moral sense) may be seen a combination and a form indeed, where every god doth seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man. (Great rattling

of glasses and thumping of knives; Mr. Zachariah Blemish looks curiously and unconsciously interested, as if still wondering who is the individual indicated; and the Honourable Mr. Peter Puff gives a sigh of relief, having delivered himself correctly of a quotation which he had taken great pains the day before to learn by heart.) Need I say, gentlemen, that I refer to our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish? (Prolonged applause; the thumping and rattling are terrific. Mr. Blemish appears much astonished to learn that he is the individual referred to, and perceiving that all eyes are turned towards him, assumes an air of exceeding humility.) Gentlemen, we all know him (Cries of 'We do!') and we are all proud to know him. (Cries of 'We are!') Say that we know him only as Chairman of the United Band of Temperance Aborigines, and he is entitled to our approval; say that we know him only as President of the Moral Bootblacking Boys' Reformatory, and he is entitled to our respect; say that we know him only as the Perpetual Grand Master of the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice, and he is entitled to our esteem; say that we know him only as the head of the Association of Universal Philanthropists, and he is entitled to our admiration; say that we know him only as a leading member of the

Fellowship of Murray Cods, and he is entitled to our veneration. But say that we know him as all of these combined, and as a merchant of integrity, and as a gentleman of honour, and words fail us in speaking of him. Gentlemen, words fail *me* when I speak of him. Far better for me to stay my speech, and leave what is unsaid to your discrimination and your intelligence. Suffice it for me to say that I am proud to know him, and that I am proud of this opportunity of expressing my sentiments. With these few remarks—inadequate as they are to the occasion—I conclude, and propose the health of our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish—in bumpers!”

Hurrah! In bumpers! Our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish. No heeltaps! Three cheers for Mr. Zachariah Blemish! with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Three cheers for Mrs. Zachariah Blemish! Three cheers for the little Blemishes (which fell flat, for the little Blemishes were *in futuro*). For he’s a jolly good fellow—for he’s a jolly good fellow—which nobody can deny—with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! And a little one in—hurrah!

All which being enthusiastically performed, the guests, somewhat exhausted with their exertions,

sat down with the consciousness of having nobly done their duty.

Mr. Zachariah Blemish, in a voice which trembled with emotion, rose to thank the gentlemen who had so enthusiastically responded to the toast of his health.

“Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Gentlemen,” he said, “this is the happiest moment of my life, and I am naturally much affected. (Pocket-handkerchief.) When I look around and see the leading members of every profession and every important interest in the Colony, and when I consider that they are assembled here to render a tribute of respect to so unworthy an object as myself (Cries of ‘No, no!’)—yes, I repeat, so unworthy an object as myself, I am lost in wonder as to what I have done to entitle me to such an honour. I am conscious, gentlemen, of having only performed my duty. It is no very hard task, and yet it is not always done. As a merchant, as a citizen, and as a public man, this has been my endeavour. In the performance of my duty I may have done some little good. (Cries of ‘A great deal.’) You are kind enough to say so. The good I have done reflects but small credit upon myself; for it has been, as I may say, evoked by my position as a not

inconsiderable merchant in this city. Gentlemen, I *am* proud of my position as a merchant ; and never in my hands shall commerce be degraded—never in my hands shall the spirit of fair and honest dealing which characterises the British nation be abused. (Thumps and rattles.) I am extremely affected by this demonstration. (Pocket-handkerchief.) You will excuse me if my emotion overcomes me, and you will pardon the little incoherences you may detect in my speech. (Pocket-handkerchief.) It is usual on such occasions as this to give a brief *resumé* of the movements and acts of the individual upon whom is conferred an honour like the present ; and I, with your permission, will touch upon one or two little matters in which I have taken a slight interest. Our worthy chairman, my friend, the Honourable Mr. Peter Puff—(a beaming smile from that individual)—has mentioned the names of a few societies and associations with which I am connected. You all know, gentlemen, the difficulties with which the formation of the United Band of Temperance Aborigines was attended. When the white man first set his foot upon these shores he found the native savage wallowing in ignorance and immorality. They ran about naked ; civilisation was a dead letter to them ;

they knew nothing of Christianity; and although attempts have been made to throw a doubt upon their practice of cannibalism, we are all perfectly well aware that the Australian aboriginals were in the habit of eating and enjoying one another. Then, again, they were given to intemperance, and would sacrifice anything for a pint of rum. What was the duty of a Christian when these things became known? To reform the savage. For this purpose the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals was formed, blankets were distributed, moralising influences were brought to bear, and I am proud to be able to state my opinion, founded upon statistics, that in the course of fifty years from the present time, not a single intoxicated aboriginal will be found in the length and breadth of the colony. (Loud applause.) As for the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice, we do our best. Vice is not yet totally suppressed; but we look forward to the time when we shall view, perhaps in the spirit, the successful accomplishment of the work we have initiated in the flesh. The operations of the Moral Bootblackening Boys' Reformatory, of which I am President, are well known. The institution of boot-stands in the streets of Melbourne has been attended with inconceivable blessings. A large



number of boys, who did not even know the meaning of morality, have been made moral through the influence of boot-stands. It is but a few days ago that I was made the humble instrument of redeeming a vagrant—a boy in years—who unblushingly admitted that he was a thief; he had never before worked at any honest employment, and when I incidentally introduced the subject of salvation, he actually told me that his soul would go to immortal perdition, and could not be saved. The saving of this lad's soul—who bears the extraordinary name of Grif—dates from the moment when he received from the Reformatory a set of blacking-brushes and a boot-stand; and he may now be seen, daily, in the streets, waiting for customers. (Cheers.) What shall I say, gentlemen, of the Murray Cods? You are acquainted with the gigantic difficulties with which we had to contend, and which we have successfully overcome. Here was a fish, vast in its proportions, delicious in its flavour—(Hear, hear, from Mr. David Dibbs),—which could only be caught in the River Murray. Why should it not be transplanted, if I may use the word, to other waters? That was a question, gentlemen, which naturally suggested itself to the Murray Coddians. A society was formed, subscrip-

tions were raised, and the monopoly the River Murray enjoyed in its Cod was destroyed. This is a single but significant proof of the determination of the colonists. In our hearts, gentlemen, we are all Murray Coddians. The energy which the Murray Cods threw into their task reflects credit upon the Colony—(here the Honourable Mr. Peter Puff whispers to the speaker)—and I am informed by our honourable Chairman, that on this very dinner-table was placed a Murray Cod which was not caught in the River Murray. (Frantic applause.) I look upon the Cod placed upon the dinner-table this evening as a mark of respect paid to me for my efforts in its cause; and looking upon it in that light, I cannot restrain a natural feeling of emotion. (Pocket-handkerchief.) Gentlemen, here I pause. The remembrance of this happy evening will always be with me. You have imposed upon me a debt of gratitude, which is the only debt, gentlemen, which I doubt of ever being able to pay. Heaven bless you!"

In the next morning's papers appeared glowing accounts of the dinner, and verbatim reports of Mr. Blemish's speech. But if the reporters, while they were transcribing their shorthand notes, could have seen the object of the night's adulation, they might

have been puzzled to account for the singular change that had come over his appearance. For, say it was two o'clock in the morning when they sent away the printer's devil with the last slip, at that very hour Mr. Zachariah Blemish was locked in the private room of his mansion near the sea, his table strewn with papers and documents, and his head resting wearily on his hands. Surely that was not the face of Mr. Zachariah Blemish! Its freshness and roundness had departed from it; it looked positively thin and haggard. Did the great Blemish possess a skeleton, and was it even now staring at him in the face in his own sanctum? It looked uncommonly like it. Or, perhaps the triumph of the evening had been too much for him, and he was thinking of his own unworthiness. Under any circumstances, it was well for Mr. Zachariah Blemish that he kept such expressions as his face then wore for his own private use, and that he did not exhibit them in public.

It was about two o'clock in the morning, also, that Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was wending his way, somewhat unsteadily, homeward. He had been at the Blemish banquet, and had lingered until the very last moment. Then he had been cajoled into

joining half a dozen gay fellows, in "just another glass," which just another glass having been submitted to a multiplication process, rendered him a decidedly unfit companion for a lady with such a strong sense of the proprieties as Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall. Some notion of this sort floated across his mind, and produced therein considerable disturbance, inasmuch as he stopped suddenly in the midst of the chorus—"We won't go home till morning," which was being trolled out by himself and a couple of young gentlemen, who had volunteered to see him home, and shook his head gravely and reproachfully.

"Ni—hic!—cholas Nuttall!" he observed, leaning his back against a lamp-post, "Ni—hic!—cholas Nuttall, you are an immoral cha—hic!—character."

The two young gentlemen, one of whom was Something in the Civil Service, and the other, Something in the Military, who had been induced to see Mr. Nuttall home solely because he had a pretty daughter, endeavoured to persuade him to walk on.

"Haw—haw—" said the Something in the Civil Service. "Come home—haw—old fellow!"

"Home!" scornfully exclaimed Mr. Nicholas Nuttall, and regarding the Something in the Civil

Service with an expression of deep disdain. "Home !—hic !—do you know what home is—hic !—Home is a—hic !—place where you are badgered—hic !—and nagged—hic !—and worried. I wish you were married to Mrs. Nuttall !"

Here Mr. Nuttall began to cry, and called himself a villain, and a destroyer of domestic hearths. He allowed himself, however, to be prevailed upon to resume his homeward course, and in a very miserable condition he arrived at his street door.

"Gentlemen !" he then said, "my wife—hic !—does not—not allow me a latch—hic !—key. Pull the bell. When you are married—hic !—have a latch key put down—hic !—in the settlements. This—hic !—is the advice of a miserable wretch."

The sound of steps along the passage drove Mr. Nuttall into a condition of abject despair. "Don't go—hic !"—he exclaimed, affectionately clinging to his companions. "Don't go—hic !—come in and have a glass—toddy."

The person who was unfastening the door had evidently heard strange voices, for it was suddenly thrown open, and a glimpse of a white nightgown flying hastily up the stairs, flitted across the vision of the three inebriates.

"Come in," said Mr. Nuttall, with a mingled

feeling of exultation and dismay, for he knew that the figure in white was the figure of the wife of his bosom. "Hic!—come in, and we'll make a night of it."

But when they got in, they were doomed to disappointment. The cupboards were locked, and not a bottle or glass could be found. The Something in the Civil Service and the Something in the Military were therefore compelled to beat a retreat. Left to himself, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall sank into a chair. He was in the enemy's camp, and he felt that there was no hope for him. With his head sunk upon his bosom, he waited doggedly for the blow.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, in her nightgown, looked ridiculously diminutive; but her moral power was tremendous. Mr. Nuttall felt its effects the instant she made her appearance; and he shivered. When she seated herself opposite to him, he had not the courage to raise his head. He thought that she would speak first, but he was mistaken. He waited for a long time, and the silence grew so awfully oppressive that he was compelled to break it.

"Why did you lock up all the de—hic!—canters?" he asked.

"Because I knew the state you would come home

in," returned his spouse; "and I have some regard for your health, little as you deserve it."

"You've no right, Mrs. Nuttall, to make me look—hic!—ridiculous in the eyes of my friends."

"Ridiculous!" said Mrs. Nuttall, with lofty sarcasm. "As if you don't make yourself look ridiculous enough without my help! You may outrage my feelings as much as you like, sir, but you shall not turn the parlour into a tap-room, although it *may* be the custom in this country!"

"The two young gentlemen who came home with me are very respec—hic!—table."

"Don't tell me, Mr. Nuttall!" said Mrs. Nuttall. "Gentlemen, indeed! A couple of tipsy brutes!"

"Why didn't you—hic!—go to bed? You must be very cold, sitting up with scarcely anything on."

"I *am* very cold. But what do you care for that?"

"Not a bit," murmured Nicholas, recklessly.

"And this man I married!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, in a horror-struck voice, appealing to the chairs and tables. "This is the man I sacrificed myself for. This is the man I sit up for night after night, while he is dissipating and destroying the happiness of his family!"

"Don't be stupid—hic!—Maria!" said Mr. Nut-

tall, rising, and staggering to the door. "I am going to bed. Where's the door-handle? You haven't locked that up, have you?"

Mrs. Nuttall made no reply, but walked after him, statelily, with the chamber-candlestick in her hand.

"A nice example you are to your children!" she said, when she got between the sheets. "A nice example!"

"Children, Maria!" exclaimed Mr. Nuttall, before she could proceed any further. "Children! You—hic!—forget yourself, my dear. We've only got one."

"A pretty thing to reproach me with, upon my word!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, indignantly. "A nice example you are, then, to our only child! I wonder you don't want to come to bed with your boots on! Oh, if I had known this before I was married——"

"It's too late now, Maria," observed Mr. Nuttall, maliciously, tugging at his boots.

"That's right," sobbed the lady, the frills of her nightcap fluttering in sympathy with her agitation. "Taunt me with my folly! But I deserve it. I brought it all on myself. Mamma warned me of the consequences, when I told her that I had accepted



you ; but I wouldn't listen to her, and now I am justly punished. Oh ! turn your head the other way. How you smell of tobacco ! ' Take my word for it,' mamma said, ' if you marry that ninny, you will repent it all your life.' " Here Mrs. Nuttall jumped up suddenly in the bed, and said, " Mr. Nuttall, there is some one walking about in the parlour."

" I don't care," murmured Nicholas, digging his head into his pillow. " He won't find much to eat and drink ; that's one comfort."

" Get up and see if there is any one there, or I shan't be able to sleep a wink all the night."

" Get up yourself, and see," suggested Nicholas, drowsily.

" Is it possible," indignantly continued Mrs. Nuttall, " that any man can be so unmanly ? Nicholas ! Do you hear me ? "

" Don't bother ! Let me go to sleep ! "

" Perhaps it's the new servant I took this morning. I shouldn't wonder if Australian servants walked in their sleep."

" If I thought so," murmured Nicholas, " I would go and admonish her. She's a very pretty girl."

Wifely indignation kept Mrs. Nuttall silent for awhile, but she soon commenced the nagging system

again, and so worried her husband that, in an agony of desperation, he sprang up like a Jack-in-a-box, and after driving his fist fiercely into his pillow half-a-dozen times, fell back exhausted.

"Very pretty!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, sarcastically. "Very pretty, indeed! I wonder you don't beat me!"

"The man who raises his hand against a woman," said Mr. Nuttall, slumberously, "except in the way of kindness, is—is—I don't exactly remember what he is. There's a thing, Maria, I have thought of often, and have never spoken of to you. It isn't right—there should not be any secrets between man and wife."

"My very words, Nicholas, my dear! What is it you are going to say?"

"In the course of our confidential conversations—such as we are having now, Maria"—(in her eagerness not to lose a word, Mrs. Nuttall placed her ear close to her husband's lips, for he spoke very drowsily, and appeared to be addressing his pillow)—"you have frequently mentioned your respected mamma. Did she know a lady of the name of Mrs. Caudle?"

"I am not aware that she knew any person with such a vulgar name."

"You never heard her speak of Mrs. Caudle?"

"Never!"

"Strange!" murmured Mr. Nuttall. "There is a deep mystery here. For you have the Mrs. Caudle spirit so very strongly developed, Maria, that I am certain a family connection exists between you."

Not knowing whether this were meant for a compliment or a reproach, Mrs. Nuttall deemed it wise to make no comment upon it. So she proceeded to ask him about the dinner at which he had been present.

"It was a very nice dinner," said Mr. Nuttall.

"And how many people were there, Nicholas?"

"A room full."

"How do I know what sized room it was—it might hold twenty, or it might hold a thousand—how many sat down to dinner?"

"A hundred—a hundred and fifty—two hundred—two hundred and fifty," said Mr. Nuttall, vaguely.

"Was your brother there, Nicholas?"

"No."

"Did Mr. Blemish make a speech?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"All sorts of things."

"Nicholas, you are enough to vex a saint. Tell me instantly, what did Mr. Blemish say?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Nuttall groaned, and screwed himself up tight in the bed-clothes.

"That's right," said Mrs. Nuttall, tugging at the sheets. "I'd take up the whole bed, if I were you!" Mr. Nuttall partially unscrewed himself. "I'm much obliged, I'm sure! And now, Nicholas, answer me one question. Are we going to spend Christmas at your brother's Station?"

"Yes. I have told you so a dozen times."

"I wanted to make certain," she said, sweetly. "Good night, Nicholas."

"Oh, good-night," he said, somewhat savagely, muttering between his clenched teeth, "I wish the man who invented Caudle lectures had been at the bottom of the Red Sea first!"

And sleep then descended upon the Conjugal Nuttalls.

## CHAPTER X.

### ON THE ROAD TO EL DORADO.

FAR and wide, through the length and breadth of Victoria, over its borders into New South Wales, and over the seas to neighbouring Colonies, floated marvellous stories of the New Rush. Ears burned, eyes glistened, and fingers tingled at the news. Men, separated from the spot by hundreds of miles of land, by thousands of miles of ocean, made frantic arrangements to fly thither incontinently. The hearts of those in Great Britain who contemplated emigration beat faster at the news brought by the Overland Mail; and the tongues of the Celestials who meant to move from China to the Land of Gold chattered and wagged at a fearful rate when rumours of the big nuggets reached them. Merchants grew exultant as they thought of shipments on the road, and reckoned up the profits beforehand. Servants threw up their situations; family men broke up their homes; and tradesmen

wound up their businesses at any sacrifice. Cherished ambitions, life-dreams approaching to fruition, calm, peaceful ways of living, were all forgotten and forsaken in the fever of gold-greed, which spread itself through many lands.

Over the waters came regiments of adventurers, each man burning to give Nature a bruise or a blow. What brought them? Gold! It beckoned them with its golden finger, it flung a yellow shade before them, it filled their minds with desire in the day, it hopped about their brains in the night. It wooed them, and kissed them, and embraced them, and nestled in their hearts, and smiled in their eyes, and made their fingers tingle. Down to the ports of distant countries hurried cohorts of warriors, with beds upon their backs, and picks upon their shoulders. The Gold God that had awakened into life threw its irradiations thousands of miles around it, dyed the steepes of far-off mountains and illumined far-off plains. From those plains and mountains shoals of men hurried down to the ports. Ships were laid on, labourers shouted and bellowed, chains creaked and squeaked, anchors groaned and moaned, ropes strained their every fibre, and bales and cases piled themselves one above another, jealous not of elbow-room. Blow winds, and fill

the sails! The sun is setting, and the shimmer of the Gold God is in the west, and lights the waters with a golden radiance; the sun is rising, and the shimmer of the Gold God is in the east, and is reflected on the rosy clouds; the ship is rushing onward, and the sails puff out their gray cheeks towards the promised land; the men are sleeping in their bunks, and a little image of Queen Mab, cast in pure gold, is sitting on a throne in the centre of each brain. If thought were not immaterial and colourless, the fashion of that epoch would have been bright yellow.

The Colony itself was in a ferment, and night and day the roads to the locality of the New Rush were thronged with eager pedestrians. Scraps of news, picked up Heaven only knew how, about wonderful "finds" of gold, about great nuggets and bucketsful of the precious metal, flew from mouth to mouth. The stories lost nothing in the transmission; for pennyweights were magnified to ounces, ounces to pounds, pounds to hundredweights. Troops of sturdy diggers, their heavy "swags" upon their backs, and their tin pots and pannikins buckled to their waists, marched on bravely and cheerfully, and felt not fatigue. Truly have such men been called the bone and sinew of the gold colonies. For

thorough manliness, for sturdy courage, for indomitable perseverance, they are scarcely to be paralleled in the world's history. Strings of shambling Chinamen, with pigtailed and sallow faces, dressed in half-modern costume, and bearing on their shoulders poles, upon which were slung their boots, picks, shovels, and "cradles,"\* were also there, toiling patiently along to the El Dorado, and receiving with good humour the badinage of the Saxon and the Celt. They did not travel as swiftly as the Europeans; but, like the tortoise, they were slow and sure, and were not unlikely to win the race. Drays creaked and sighed in woeful tribulation beneath the weight of bags of flour and cases of spirits, sent off to the New Rush by watchful speculators. Many were the perils the goods encountered, in gullies and creeks; and many were the accidents, most of them, however serious, having some ludicrous features. Here might be seen a waggon piled up with diggers' swags, chiefly Chinamen's, the owners being perched on the top, while the remainder trudged patiently along in the dust. There, a troupe of Nigger serenaders, with bones and banjos, their faces already blackened for the

\* Machines in which diggers wash the gold from the auriferous soil.



amusement of the wandering hordes. Here, a couple of drays, in which were packed cases of type and printing-press for the printing of a newspaper in the bush! There, a travelling theatre, consisting of a huge tent with all the paraphernalia of scenery and dresses: the leading tragedian (descended to dull earth) played the part of driver for the nonce, entertaining his cattle with morsels of morality from Hamlet or Macbeth; while the low-comedy man, his face woefully begrimed with dust, tramped sturdily along, bearing upon his shoulders the infant prodigy of the company. Day after day the roads were thronged with workers from all parts of the colony, and when night came, trees were cut down and fired, horses and oxen were turned loose, water was fetched from adjacent creeks, tea was prepared, and pipes were lighted, and tents and "mi-mis" \* hastily thrown up, beneath which the nomades rested their weary limbs, hopefully and cheerfully. It was a pretty sight to see the fires glancing out along the miles of dusky bush, and it was pleasant to feel the sense of rest which had fallen upon the busy plains. The tinkling bells attached to the necks of hobbled horses sounded musically on the

\* A shelter for the night, made with the boughs and branches of the trees. Pronounced "mi-mis."


air, and from silver-toned flutinas, in the hands of rough-bearded men, sounded "Home, Sweet Home," and many other airs as touching, the strains of which lingered lovingly about the trees, whose dark forms were glanced with light from a clear and brilliant moon.

Amongst those who were attracted to the promised land by the news of the wonderful discoveries was Richard Handfield. He had picked up as a mate an old digger, whose Herculean frame appeared fit to bear any amount of fatigue—a man known as Tom the Welshman, and commonly called Welsh Tom for brevity's sake. He was a simple, kind-hearted creature, always ready to do a good turn, and not always able to avoid being imposed upon. He was fond of nursing children, and drawing water, and chopping wood, to lighten the labours of the women who were fortunate enough to be living in his neighbourhood. He was a lucky digger, and he scattered his gold about freely. He had been in the Colonies since his youth, and for a great portion of his time he had been a bullock-driver. One might have thought that this would have been sufficient to make him cruel and hard-hearted; but the contrary was the case. He swore at his bullocks like other bullock-drivers, but he

did not lash them. Even when he swore at them, the poor oxen seemed to know that he was not unkindly; and if such a feeling as gratitude be inherent in bullock nature, it must surely have been strong in the Welshman's oxen, for he regarded with pity a sore shoulder or a wound, and would apply such simple remedies as he was acquainted with to ease the pain. And yet, gentle as he was by nature, loved as he was by all his acquaintances, there was a stain upon him which would never, in this world, be wiped out. He had been convicted of some offence in the home country, and had been sentenced to life transportation. He did not often refer to this portion of his career, although, when the subject arose, he solemnly and consistently protested his innocence. He never travelled without his concertina, from which he extracted the most exquisite music. But his greatest treasure was an old Welsh Bible, which had been his mother's, and no night passed without his reading a chapter from it. He was fond of his glass, was the Welshman, and sometimes he took more than was good for him. On such occasions he would retire to some secluded spot, and, bareheaded, preach to the hills in red-hot Welsh. It was a thing to remember, was the sight of this gaunt, strong man, flinging his arms wildly

about in his enthusiasm, while the impassioned gutturals rolled fast and furious from his throat. Those who knew him never interfered with him when he was in such ecstasies; he was perfectly harmless, and on the succeeding morning was always up with the sun, ready for work.

Richard Handfield was fortunate in picking up Welsh Tom for a mate; for Richard was an idle fellow, while the Welshman buckled to his work with overwilling zeal. When their day's walking was done, and a suitable place had been found to camp in, it was the Welshman who felled the tree, and the Welshman who fetched the water from the creek, and the Welshman whose ready hands extemporised a sleeping-place; while all that Richard did was to gather a few dry branches and to make the tea. Even this he did unwillingly and grumblingly, repining at what he thought his hard lot. He had never been used to work, and, although he and his mate had walked but twenty-five miles that day, his feet were blistered, and he was sore and weary. The Welshman, whose limbs were hardened by constant exposure and years of toil, felt as fresh as when he started in the morning, and could have walked another twenty-five miles with ease. But, anxious as he was to arrive quickly at



the new diggings, he did not grumble at the short day's journey, and, when tea was over, he sat down, pipe in mouth, with perfect contentedness.

Of course, the talk between them was of the new gold discovery, which had been made upon an immense plain.

"Discovered by Chinamen, eh, Tom?" queried Richard.

"Yes, Dick," answered the Welshman. (It is soon Tom and Dick with new acquaintances upon gold-fields. The conventional "Mr." is but seldom used, and never among diggers.) "John Chinaman got the first bite."

"Just like their luck," grumbled Richard; "why couldn't a white man have found it?"

Tom did not reply, for in common with most of the European gold diggers, he entertained a very low estimate of the Mongolian race, and looked upon them in the light of interlopers.

"I always thought gold would be found in that quarter," he said, presently; "I passed over the flat six years ago, and I almost fancied I could see the gold at the bottom."

"I should have tried it," said Richard.

"I was taking a load of wool down to Melbourne at the time, and I was single-handed. Besides, it's

a thousand chances to one if I had hit upon gold. A rich gold-field gets scratched over a hundred times before it's found out. No gold-field ever is any good, or ever proves itself very rich, until a big rush sets into it."

The conversation not being continued, Welsh Tom took his concertina from its case, and played some simple melodies. Attracted by the sounds, a party of diggers, camping not many yards away, strolled towards the spot, and stood about the musician in easy attitudes, listening to his music. At the conclusion of a little piece of delicious extemporising, one of the party asked the Welshman to play "Shades of Evening," which he did very sweetly; and then the same man said, "Play 'Alice Gray,' mate." It was an especially favourite air with the Welshman, and he played it with much feeling. As the last note died softly away, the diggers strolled back to their camping-place.

Perhaps the only one who heard the melodies, and who was not thoroughly softened by them, was Richard Handfield. In the hearts of the rough diggers there was a stir of deep emotion as the sounds travelled into space; the music of sweet remembrance dimmed many an eye, and took their thoughts from the strange present into the realms

of long ago. But not so with Richard. His was a nature that needed constant control. With Alice by his side to strengthen him, he could be strong; left to his own resources, his weak nature asserted itself in repinings. He pined for a result, but had not sufficient strength of purpose to work for its accomplishment. Thus, fortified as he was, brave as he felt himself to be, when he parted from Alice, no sooner was he torn from the influence of her presence, than he became again a murmurer at the hardships of his lot. The picture of this man's nature is a true one, and is not overdrawn.

He sat, on this evening, moody and discontented, looking with a dash of contempt at the Welshman, who, reclining upon the earth, with his back against a tree, was playing softly the old familiar airs. He could not help thinking that this man was beneath him, this man who could be contented with so little, and who had no disturbing memories to render him miserable. At the same time he was envious of him, as was evidenced by the remark he made.

"I wish I was like you, Welshman."

"Like me!" the Welshman exclaimed, in a tone of simple surprise.

"Yes; you haven't a care. No wife, no children,

no ambition. Give you your pipe and your concertina, and you are happy and contented."

Welsh Tom sighed, and said, "And you?"

"I am the most miserable dog in the world. I wish I had never been born."

"There's no use in wishing that, mate. The best way is, to make the best of it."

"That's all very well for you. You have led a hard, rough life, and are used to it. I wish I had been brought up like you. It would have been all the better for me."

Welsh Tom sighed again, but did not reply.

"I was brought up as a gentleman," continued Richard, following the current of his own selfish thoughts, "and just at my age, when I ought to be enjoying life, I have to sweat for my living. You would not think of it so lightly if you were married——"

"I think it would make life all the sweeter," said the Welshman, simply.

"*You* think!" exclaimed Richard, so disdainfully, that any man but the Welshman would have fired up. "What do you know of marriage and its responsibilities?"

"Nothing."

"What do you know of the weight it is upon a



man, what a clog it is upon him when he is in misfortune; how it frets him, and worries him, and drives him almost mad? Why, I doubt if you have ever been in love!"

"I don't think I have."

"Well, then," said Richard, impatiently, "what's the use of talking about it?"

"Not much; yet I've sometimes wished that my life had been different. I've sometimes wished that I had a woman to love me, and children to bring up. I've often thought, What use am I, rough and strong as I am, in the world? I have been sinful enough at times to envy my mates who had wives and children; and, as I've laid myself down upon my bed, have wished that I could hear the prattle of children about my pillow. Foolish of me, no doubt!"

"Better to be without them. You have no cares, and no one but yourself to look after. Why, look here! I have a wife whom I married for love—her father is a wealthy hunk, but he discarded her for marrying me. What is the result? Misfortune pursued me, and we are both miserable. Would it not have been better that we had never met? Of course it would. So you may thank your stars that you haven't a wife to drag your thoughts down to desperation point, as my wife does mine."

"Isn't she a good wife?"

"Fifty thousand times too good for me."

The Welshman refilled his pipe, and, after puffing for a few moments, said—

"What one man sighs for, another man groans at. Of course it's absurd for such a rough-and-ready chap as me to say that if I had a wife fifty-thousand times too good for me, I should look upon her as a blessing. I've never had much experience of women. The only woman I ever loved was my old mother; but, although I daresay I am ignorant enough with regard to womankind, I often think that the world is like a garden, and that the women and children are the flowers in it."

"Is the world like a garden to you?" asked Richard. "I have heard that you have had pretty hard lines in it, too."

"So I have. But, you see, it is not my fault. I might make things worse for myself, but I don't know how I could make them better."

"Very fine philosophy that, I dare say," Richard continued to grumble; "but all men are not made the same, and all men don't think the same. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. You like this sort of life; you don't feel it any hardship to walk thirty or forty miles a day. You were never

brought up to expect anything better. I was. And I can't sit still, and be grateful for misfortune."

Far away, through the miles of tall gaunt trees that stood in dark relief, like sentinels of the night, the watch-fires were glimmering; men bodily weary, but into whose hearts had stolen the peacefulness of nature, were lying contentedly about, enjoying the sweet incense of repose. Heaven's eyes were looking down upon them; God's handiwork surrounded and encompassed them. The solemn trees; the bright stars; the evanescent flash that marked the lizard's track; the hushed air that glided through the forests of the New World, the faintest tracery of whose minutest leaf is more marvellous than man's greatest work; and all the myriad visible and invisible wonders of the wondrous earth: contributed to the holiness of the night. The Welshman looked round and beyond, where the glimmering watch-fires lost themselves in dark depths. Then he looked at Richard, and said, as if wishful to woo him to a softer mood,—

"If she were here——"

"My wife?" queried Richard.

"Your wife. If she were here, she would think this very beautiful."

"If she were here," said Richard, less fretfully;

and then more softly still, he repeated, "If she were here—ah! I know what I would wish."

"What?"

"I should wish—but first (I don't mind telling you, Welshman, for you are a good fellow, I think), I should like to lie with my head in her lap, and see her soft eyes looking into mine—I should wish that we might fall asleep upon this peaceful night, and never wake up again! What a grand and awful thing to think of! All of us, as far as we can see, to fall asleep for ever, and for it to be always quiet and peaceful as it is now. Yet quiet as it is, I do not feel inclined for sleep."

"I will tell you my story if you like," said Welsh Tom. "It isn't very long, and I don't suppose it is very interesting. But I feel as if I should like to tell it to-night."

"All right," said Richard, with some slight show of curiosity. "I'm listening."

## CHAPTER XI.

### WELSH TOM.

"I WAS born in North Wales," commenced the Welshman, "near the Valley of Clwyd, in Denbighshire, and I passed my days at home in idleness. My father died when I was very young, and I cannot remember him. My mother was a little dark-skinned woman. I can see her now in her widow's weeds; she never left them off from the time of my father's death. I got some little education from an old clergyman, but not much, for I was too fond of roaming over the hills and valleys to pay attention to study. You can tell by my accent, that I am Welsh born. My dear mother was very proud of her descent, and like many old Welsh families, hers had a pedigree which she could trace back many centuries, and which connected us with a royal line. My father left some property, which brought in about forty pounds a year. Upon this we lived, and we were looked upon as quite rich people.

There were three of us at home—my mother, my sister, and myself. We were the family. When I say I passed my days in idleness, I mean that I was brought up to no trade, and did not work for money. But I found the days quite short enough. I fished, and hunted, and made excursions to the neighbouring mountains. One day, when I was returning from Moel-Fammau, I fell in with a gentleman, who told me he was making a pedestrian tour for pleasure. We got into conversation together, and he walked with me until we came to my mother's house. I was pleased with him, and I invited him to our evening meal. He made himself very agreeable, and we offered him a bed for the night. The chance acquaintance ripened into intimacy, and he stayed with us some time. Lake and woodland round about the Valley of Clwyd are magnificent. He was delighted with the scenery, and, being an artist, was desirous of taking away with him some sketches of what he called a paradise upon earth. So, he with his sketch-book, and I with my gun and rod, would go in search of pretty bits of scenery, and he would sketch while I shot or fished. We were away from home sometimes for two or three days. We climbed Snowdon together, and caught otters on the banks of shy streams,

which seemed to be trying to hide themselves from our sight. Many weeks passed in this manner, and we became much attached to one another—that is, I became much attached to him. The life of seclusion I had led made me like him better than I should have done, perhaps, had I been a worldly man, or had I been, as I am now, better acquainted with the world. He was to my life as bright clouds are to the sky. We were all fond of him: I, because I had never had a friend; my mother, because he would indulge her in her pet pride of royal descent (he would talk with her for hours about ancient Wales and its noble kings); and my sister—half a minute, mate, my pipe's out."

He paused to relight it, and continued:


"My sister liked him too well, although I did not suspect it at the time. We took no notice of their being often together, for you see he was our guest, and no suspicion of wrong entered our minds. Even when the time drew near that he must depart, I did not think it strange that my sister should look grieved at his going from us. We all felt sorry—he had so enlivened our quiet home with his gay manners and conversation, that it was impossible he could have been easily forgotten. I accompanied him many miles on his road, and with expressions

of friendship we parted. For some days after his departure, the sunshine of our home seemed to have disappeared; but little by little it came back, and our quiet life was resumed. But not for long—for one day my sister was missing, and all our anxious searchings and inquiries brought us no tidings of her. My mother was distracted, and I thought at the time it would be her death. A few weeks after my sister's disappearance, a letter came from her, asking our forgiveness for her flight, and saying that she hoped soon to visit us, a happy wife. She made no allusion to any person in the letter, but a mother's loving perception detected the sad strain in which it was written; and many were the bitter tears she wept over the letter. I looked at the postmark on the envelope, "Wenlock," and resolved to go to Shropshire to try and find my sister. Dishonour had never fallen on our family, and although no word of the fear which haunted us both passed between my mother and myself, I saw and knew the dread which possessed her. I went to Wenlock. I did not think, as I left my home, with a look at my gun and my fishing-tackle, that I should never see them again, and that the Valley of Clwyd would receive me no more. The day after my arrival at Wenlock, I met the man whose name



was Hardy, who had made our home so bright while he stopped with us. Then, when I saw him, the suspicion that had entered my mind that he was connected with my sister's flight, flashed into conviction. I questioned him, but he denied all knowledge of her. It needed not the unquiet look or the hesitating speech to convince me that he lied. He did lie, as I knew. It was not long before I found my sister, and learned from her lips the shame that had fallen upon our family. I can see her now, crouching before me, as she sobbed out her confession; indeed, it was little she said, but it was enough. I can see her face—it might be looking upon me in the light of this beautiful moon!—as she raised it, tear-covered, to me, and implored my forgiveness. Poor child! I could not reproach her; she was punished enough already for her sin. But I determined to seek my false friend, and to force him to make reparation. He received me civilly enough, but almost laughed in my face when I asked him to marry my sister. I spoke of the honour of our family, and begged him not to tarnish it; I recalled to his mind the welcome and the hospitality he, a stranger, had received at our hands; I spoke of my mother, and of the blow it would be to her;—but he only sneered at me, and

with his specious tongue tried to put me off. I was hot, and he was cool, and when he left me, I was goaded almost into madness. It appeared to me incredible that hospitality should be so violated. That night, after I had once more visited my sister, I determined to see this man again, and to appeal more strongly, if I could, to his sense of honour. And if he does not marry her, I thought, I would kill him! For what reason I do not know, for I was strong enough for anything, I put a pistol into my pocket. It was late in the night when I went to his residence. The doors were closed, but at the back of the house I saw a light shining in a window, and a shadow I could swear was his upon the blind. I soon climbed over the low wall which enclosed the garden, and then I scrambled up to the window, and dashed into the room. He was half undressed, and his face turned very white when he saw me. My words were few: I told him I was determined not to submit to dishonour. He would have called out, but I presented my pistol, and swore I would shoot him if he raised his voice. He knew that I would keep my word, and he promised me that he would marry my sister on the morrow. I held out my hand to him, and he shook it. We spent a few minutes in friendly talk, and



then, with a light heart, I prepared to leave the house the way I had entered it. But no sooner had I got my leg over the window-sill than he rushed to the door, and throwing it open, called loudly for assistance. I was bewildered. The pistol I had brought with me dropped to the ground. He picked it up quickly and pulled the trigger, then let it fall again to the ground. As he did so I jumped back into the room, which in an instant was filled with people, and the next moment I was seized and dragged off to prison on a charge of burglary and attempted murder. The case was quite clear: my presence in the room, the smashed window-panes, the pistol, which was proved to be mine, the bullet in the wall, made up a chain of evidence too strong, of course, to admit of doubt. There was only my bare word that the story was false; they shrugged their shoulders when they heard it, and the judge himself said that it was nothing but a shallow fabrication. They did not hesitate over the verdict; they found me guilty, and I was sentenced to transportation for life."

The Welshman paused for a few moments, and puffed away at his pipe before he resumed.

"While I was lying in prison, my sister fled. I wanted sadly to see her, but it was denied me. She

was nowhere to be found. Three days before the ship sailed which was to convey me from my country, my mother came to see me. Poor thing! she had almost lost her reason. She wept over me, and gave me this little Welsh Bible, which I have never parted with, and which shall be buried with me when I am dead. Then she was taken away, and I never saw or heard of her again. I was chained by the leg to a fellow-convict, and put on board ship. We were eight months getting to Botany Bay. The ship was a leaky old tub. The Government in those days picked out the rottenest vessels it could get to convey the convicts from their native shores. The filth and dirt of the ship were something horrible. The water was poisonous; the food was disgusting. A plan was mooted among the convicts to murder the officers, and seize the ship; but it was discovered, and half-a-dozen men were shot and thrown overboard. After that we were kept nearly the whole of the time under close hatches. How that old tub creaked and strained! Many a time I thought we were going down, and I prayed that the vessel might be dashed to pieces, and make an end of us. For during a great part of the voyage, I was angry and despairing, and almost doubted the goodness of God. But this " (and here he touched the

Bible) "has taught me better! We arrived at our destination safely enough, and were set to work. Some of the convicts in our ship did well. The man I was chained to during the voyage is now a millionaire. He bought some land in Sydney with his savings, and sold it at twenty thousand pounds an acre. I was never very fortunate. I got my ticket-of-leave, and worked for myself, chiefly at bullock-driving. I could tell you some queer anecdotes of colonial life in those days. Bushranging was all the go, and it wasn't safe to travel a hundred miles with anything valuable about you. I remember once, as I was coming into Sydney with my dray, seeing a buggy, without a horse, standing on the road. When I drove up to it there was a man inside, stark naked. He had been stuck up by bushrangers, and they had stripped him of every bit of clothing, down to his socks. They had torn from the buggy everything that he might have converted into a covering: otherwise, they did not ill-treat him. I have been a shepherd, too, and have lived by myself for months and months, without seeing the face of a single human creature. It is a trying life. I have known men grow into a state of incurable idiocy after a few months' solitariness. It is not disagreeable at first; one takes a pride in the sheep, and

enjoys the sense of independence which is the great feature in a shepherd's life; but, after a time, it is awful. To sit, night after night, with no soul to speak to, with nothing to read, with nothing to do but to smoke and think—it is no wonder that men go mad! The wonder is, that so many escape with reason. I remember a narrow brush I had with the natives. I remember it with pleasure, for even the sight of a savage, although he was eager to kill me, was a relief. I had missed some sheep, at odd times, within two or three weeks. I was actually pleased when I first made the discovery, for it gave me something new to think of. One night I determined to watch; and, sure enough, I came upon the natives, carrying off half-a-dozen or so of the fattest sheep. I did not see them sooner than they saw me, and I had to run for it. I had provided for such a contingency, and when I arrived, almost breathless, at the hut, I made all fast in a twinkling, and prepared to receive them. They came up pretty fast at my heels, but I saluted them with three barrels from my six-shooter, and all but two retreated, yelling, faster than they came. The hut was rather queerly built, just in a nook of some overhanging rocks, and there was only the front of it exposed. This was an advantage to me, for the savages could not get at

me at the back. I watched their dusky forms in the distance with absolute pleasure. It must have been quite four months since I had seen anything in the shape of a man, and though I saw him now in the shape of a deadly foe, it was better than living any longer the devil's life of solitude. Besides, I did not care much for them. If they had fought fair, I could have kept them off as long as my powder lasted. But they don't fight fair. The 'noble' savage will take any mean advantage he can of an enemy. They are a skulking, idle, dirty lot of thieves. They came to the attack three times, and each time I received them with my six-shooter, and sent them scampering back. Then they made preparations for doing what I expected, and what I was prepared for. They collected all the dead timber and dry brushwood they could lay their hands on, and threw it before my hut, topping it with a lot of green branches. They were going to smoke me out. But I was ready for them. My hut, built in the cleft of a mass of rock, concealed a great fissure at the rear. In fact, the fissure served as a sort of tunnel. I had worked at it for a long while, and had dug along the natural tunnel until I came to an outlet. This outlet I had filled up carelessly, with loose pieces of rock, so that no one

unacquainted with the secret would have suspected that it was a place of concealment. When the savages in front of the hut set fire to the pile of wood, which they did by throwing lighted branches into it from a distance, I crawled through the tunnel. A feeling did come over me, that if the savages knew of this retreat, they would be sure to guard it, and it would be all up with me; and when I reached the outlet, I was a bit curious to know if I should see any black skins knocking about. Luckily for me, there were none, and I crept away. I did not have much time to lose, for I knew they would rush the hut before it was half burnt, and would discover the tunnel; so I only crept slowly along until I thought I was out of sight of them, and then I scudded off. I ran a good many miles that night, and I thought I was pretty clear of them. But the next day, when I was within eight or ten miles of the station I was making for, I saw three of the black devils racing after me, with their skinny legs. They haven't much superfluous flesh about them, haven't the blacks. They are all skin, bone, and muscle. They had tracked me the whole way, nearly thirty miles, and when they caught sight of me, they set up a hullabaloo of delight. I was pretty tired at the time, but the sight of them put fresh life into me,



and I ran my fastest. But they were too much for me. I saw one of them disappear round a clump of timber for the purpose of cutting me off, while the other two followed straight after me. I soon came to where there was a bend in the track, and just as I turned it, the first one sprang out of the timber. He was within two hundred yards of me, and when he saw me he raised his 'boomerang,' and sent it whizzing into the air. Quick as lightning, for I knew how true those savages could aim, I turned, and ran towards the other two. Seeing this, and knowing that I had turned upon them to escape the 'boomerang,' they stopped short, suddenly, and threw their spears at me. I felt that there was nothing for it but fight. I had my revolver in my hand, loaded in its six barrels. One of their spears grazed my cheek as I flew along; and when I got close enough, I sent a bullet into the nearest one, which dropped him. Then, with a sudden rush, I closed with his companion. I had not climbed the Welsh hills in my young days for nothing. The hardy life I had spent served me now; and, as I flung my arms round the dirty savage, I knew that I could master him in the end. But, in the meantime, the one who had thrown the 'boomerang' was after me with raised spear. He

did not dare to throw it, for fear of hitting his comrade; for we were by this time upon the ground, locked in each other's arms, and rolling over one another, enveloped in a thick cloud of dust. Throughout the struggle, I kept my revolver in my hand, but had no opportunity of using it. My finger was on the trigger, and, in the scuffle, I must unconsciously have pressed upon it; for, to my surprise, it suddenly went off. For a moment I thought I was hit; but presently the clasp of the savage with whom I was struggling relaxed, and he rolled back dead. The one who had thrown the 'boomerang,' took to his heels upon hearing the report. When I rose, and got away from the dust, I could see him scampering off. I did not care to follow him. I made my way as quickly as I could to the station: and so ended my shepherd's life. After that, I turned bullock-driver. That is a dreary life enough, but it's better than being a shepherd: it's more humanising. You get a chance, now and again, of giving a lift to a poor fellow, and that does a man good, you know. I remember, one morning, missing two of my bullocks. I did not find them till pretty late in the day. I was glad enough when I heard the tinkle of their bells, I can tell you; and as I was following the sound, I came upon a man lying

in the bush. At, first, I thought he was dead ; but I felt his heart beat—very faintly, though. I carried him to the dray, and after a good deal of trouble, I brought him to. He had lost his way in the bush, and had wandered about without food for three days, until, what with hunger and despair, he had almost lost his senses. I remember he told me a curious impression he had, while he lay waiting, as he thought, for death. He had quite resigned himself to die, and as he was waiting, waiting, his thoughts of course wandered back to the time when he was a boy at home. And he came to a day when he was lying, quite a little lad, on the grass, listening to the bells of his village church. His thoughts, just then, did not wander farther back, for the death-forest he was imprisoned in changed to the field of waving grass ; he saw the leaves bending over him and about him. And the death-silence which had shrouded him was suddenly invaded by musical bells : they were the bells of his village church, playing the old familiar peals, and they actually brought to his mind a long-forgotten rhyme, which he murmured with parched lips to the ringing of the bells. He heard them sure enough, but they were not the bells of his village church ; they were the bells on the necks of my lost cattle. If my

bullocks hadn't strayed, it would have been all over with him, for he couldn't have lasted another day. So what I looked upon at first as precious hard, turned out to be a piece of real good fortune. When the goldfields were discovered, I turned to gold-digging; and between that and bullock-driving I have since spent all my time. It isn't a very attractive story, mine—is it, mate? I don't think I ever had an ambition, and my life was over when I was transported. I have often thought that if I were to meet the false friend who wrecked my life, and who destroyed the happiness of my family, I should kill him. But there is no chance of our ever meeting, and I do not yearn for it. But *I do* yearn, and have for many a year yearned, to know what became of my sister. Once I thought—it was in Melbourne three years ago, when I was loading flour for up-country—that I saw a face like hers, but it passed like a flash, and I did not see it again. It was but fancy, I know, yet it has often haunted me since. I am not the only innocent convict in the Colonies. I know some who were transported for life, for less crimes than mine—perfectly innocent men, who are living victims of what is called justice. If I had happened to stroll a different way the day I met that false friend, my life might have been

very different. I might have married, and had children, and been a happy man. I wonder if, by and by, those who suffer unjustly are recompensed in any way!"

"You are a queer fellow, Welshman," said Richard Handfield. "If I were you, and had been treated as you have been treated, I should have turned desperate, I think. By what right are men oppressed and hunted down? Say I owe a duty to society; does not society owe a duty to me? Just think for one moment of what I have suffered——"

"Of course," said the Welshman; "I do not mean to say I have as much to complain of as you. You were educated and brought up in luxury——"

"That's where it is. If I had been brought up as roughly as yourself, I might take the same view of misfortune."

"Certainly," said Welsh Tom, but in a voice which struck somewhat strangely upon his companion's ears. "There's no comparison between the hardship of our lives. But it is time to turn in. We must be up with the sun. Good night!"

And then they prepared for their night's rest.

Before falling asleep, Richard glanced at the Welshman, and saw him, with an earnest expression on his face, reading, by the light of the moon, a chapter from his mother's old Welsh Bible.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE NEW RUSH.

EARLY in the morning the plains were busy with moving life. Refreshed by their rest, the hardy gold-diggers, full of health and vigour, rose from their primitive beds, and raced to distant creeks to lave their faces, and draw the water for the morning meal. Little do the constant residents in a crowded city know of the vigorous, healthful life that stirs in the veins of these sturdy pioneers in the New World. "Take up thy bed and walk," was literally illustrated by thousands of eager men. Quickly were their rough toilets completed; quickly were the hobbles taken from the horses' feet and the bells from their necks, and quickly were they harnessed and ready to play their parts in the moving panorama; quickly were the heavy-jawed, wisdom-faced oxen yoked to the drays and waggons, patiently waiting for the flick of the whip which bade them move along, which they did at a snail's

pace, as if they were weary of their day's work before it was begun; and soon were log fires blazing, chops and steaks frizzling, and boiling tea impatiently bubbling in the queerest of utensils. Scant time was given to breakfast; scantier time was employed in rolling up blankets; less time still was occupied in arranging them over broad backs and shoulders, and starting on the march to the promised land. But one operation all performed, and all took time in performing. When everything else was adjusted, a black stump of a pipe was carefully produced, carefully loaded, and carefully lighted by the aid of a burning branch. Then, refreshed by their first pipe, the adventurers whistled away dull care, and "stumped it" at the rate of four miles an hour. It was a lovely summer morning. The sun was rising over a snow-capped range, which reared its head in the distance, a picture of beauty. As the warm rays fell upon the moss-clad giant, rills of sparkling snowdrops gemmed its face with myriad silver tears. It was a marvellous picture. But few stayed to pay it tribute. Among the few, a ragged German, upon whose shoulders were placed all his worldly treasure—a calico tent, a couple of blankets, and a flat-faced, stolid-looking little boy, who, as his father




pointed to the range, crowed and clapped his hands at the glorious sight.

When evening came, and they were within twenty miles of the New Rush, Richard Handfield and the Welshman halted at a wayside inn, which had been built but a few days, and in which the proprietors were making their fortunes rapidly. It belonged to two young Scotchmen, upon whom fortune had descended unexpectedly. They had taken to wood-splitting, and were happy at that, and contented even with the little they earned, as is the proverbial way of Scotchmen. But they had the national characteristic, an eye to the main chance; and they had the still more national characteristic, the wit to take advantage of the chance. So, directly the gold fever broke out, and they saw the signs of it floating past their little six-feet-by-nine tent of drill, they built themselves a building of gum-tree slabs. In less than two days it was finished; the same evening they bargained for a dray-load of bottled beer and spirits, the first on the road to the new gold-fields; and the next morning, as impromptu hotel keepers, they commenced to make their fortunes to the tune of two hundred pounds a day. Their building was the only one for miles around, and as it stood in the midst of an amphitheatre of hills,

they dignified it by the title of the Amphitheatre Hotel. Night and day it was crowded with men who recklessly squandered their money at the bar in a state of the wildest excitement.

At ten o'clock at night, Richard and his mate were standing by the door of the Amphitheatre Hotel. The riotous noise within the hotel precluded all idea of sleep, and they stood there, looking at the moon, whose brightness was hardly dimmed by a screen of light floating clouds, and talking over the chances of their being able to get a good piece of ground at the New Rush. What is that in the distance? A white object! Moving? Yes, and moving fast. Running, racing, like one demented. White trowsers, white guernsey shirt, bare arms, and bare head—running like mad, under the white face of the moon. Who can he be? Where has he come from? Is he mad? All the inmates of the calico hotel came out to the door, waiting for the racer. And here he is, panting, his strong chest heaving, his brawny arms waving, his blue eye glaring! "Well, mate, what's the row! What's up?" Without returning any answer to these questions, the racing individual points in the direction of the New Rush, whence he has come, and gasps out, "There—got a claim—heaps of

gold—saw a bucketful dug up just before I left—off to fetch my mates!” And off he is, without—wonder of wonders!—stopping to drink. There he goes, racing off to fetch his mates: a large white speck dotting the plain beyond—a small white speck—a smaller white speck—an infinitesimal white speck—no speck at all! Meanwhile, the conversation has become very animated. They all thought so—that was the real El Dorado—they had been waiting for it for a long while, and here it was at last! Anecdotes are related as authentic, of fortunes made in a week, in a day, in an hour. Goodness knows how the information has been obtained, but suddenly these men are relating to each other wonderful accounts of thousands of ounces obtained by single individuals at the New Rush, although, before the arrival of the racing individual, they did not appear to know very much about the new field. Gradually the conversation dies out, and the diggers retire to their rest. Nothing disturbs the stillness of the night. The scene is so lovely that it might serve for the Kingdom of Dreamland. On the top of yon lofty mountain stands an old castle, wrapped about, grim shadow as it is, by the soft moonlight. Near it, each rugged rock and stone assumes a living shape.



Why creep they away so stealthily? Are they rock or human? Psha! They are but two diggers, who, excited by the news, have given up all thoughts of sleep, and are stealing away to the New Rush, so that they may not be too late for the chance of digging up a bucketful of gold!

At noon on the following day, Richard and the Welshman arrived on the ground. There were thousands of diggers there, and a long street of calico stores was already erected to supply their wants. As the new arrivals poured in, they had to traverse this street, which commenced at the mouth of the main road, so that it presented a very animated appearance, and was always thronged. Flags of all nations, and flags of no nations, were waving over the stores, many of which rejoiced in high-sounding titles. There were the Great Wonder, the Little Wonder, the Wonder of the World, and a great quantity of other Wonders. There were the Monster Emporium (which, properly, would represent an Emporium for Monsters); the Blue Store, and the Red Store (which were impositions, for they were built of unbleached calico); and the Bee-Hive, which looked like one, for it was crowded with customers. There was the Right Man in the Right Place, which was the sign of a stationer's

store, where old newspapers were being sold at exorbitant prices, and where you had to pay half-a-crown for two sheets of notepaper, two envelopes, and a pen. This store was also a kind of post-office, where you might deposit letters on payment of one shilling each, and receive them, if there were any to receive, at the same price. There were half-a-dozen auctioneers, going, going, going, with all their might. There were scores of draymen unloading their drays, and blocking up the road with cases of goods. There was a horse sale-yard, where horses were being galloped madly up and down, to the infinite risk of life and limb; and wherein the salesman talked the most outrageous nonsense, and told the most outrageous fibs, as to the wonderful qualities of the cattle he was anxious to dispose of. There were scores of hotels and restaurants for the accommodation of the natives of almost every nation under the sun. There were the Hibernian, the Spanish, the French, the American, and a host of others. Those who could not find their native clime indicated on the broad strips of calico in front of the stores, might console themselves at the All Nations; while philanthropists might rest their weary limbs at the Live and Let Live.

Forcing their way through the bustling crowd,

Richard Handfield and the Welshman soon reached the end of the straggling street of stores, and came upon the gold diggings. These were situated upon a great plain, which was dotted with strong sun-burnt men, straining at windlasses. Round some of the shafts small knots of diggers were congregated, waiting eagerly for the "prospect." One shaft had just come upon the gold, and great excitement was produced by the statement that the first bucketful of earth had yielded twelve pennyweights of the precious metal. There was no chance of getting ground near this spot, for every inch for a mile around was monopolised ; so the new-comers had to walk on till they came to a less busy part of the plain. A claim was there soon measured and marked out with pegs, and the orthodox custom of sticking the pick\* in the centre was duly performed.

\* This sticking the pick in the ground is an honoured gold-digging custom. It is the title-deed to the property. The first thing gold-diggers do when they arrive upon a newly-discovered gold-field is to look about them for a piece of ground which is most likely to be auriferous. Having made their selection, they measure as much of it as the gold-mining regulations of the colony allow them to occupy, (perhaps forty feet by sixty) stick a boundary wooden peg at each corner, and then drive their pick into the centre of their ground, which is called a "claim." Then they reconnoitre, and set about putting up their tent, and building a chimney. After-comers seeing the pick in the ground, consider it a good title-deed, and pass on to fresh spots.

Then Richard and his mate went in search of a place to put up their tent, and before evening their habitation was built, and Richard was sitting at the hearth smoking his pipe, while Welsh Tom commenced to build a new chimney. Welsh Tom was in his glory. He worked and sang, and looked every inch a man of might; even Richard could not help admiring him. His shirt sleeves of blue twill were tucked up to his shoulders, and the hard muscles of his arms showed out so grandly that Tubal-Cain himself might have been proud of them. Every now and then he would stop back and contemplated his mud chimney, and wondered how it grew like magic beneath his hands. Sad as the story of this man's life, he was happy and contented. Work—God's heritage to man—sweetened his days for him!

Night was a busy time in the township. The bars of the calico restaurants and hotels were crowded, and money was lavishly squandered in the dancing-saloons and concert-rooms, with which the township abounded. The men danced with the women; other; a barmaid was a *rara avis* indeed, and could, with impunity, give herself as many airs as the most fashionable drawing-room belle. The excitement of a New Rush is most intense: it grows frantic from mere contagion. There was

free-and-easy concert-room, filled with diggers, who shouted out the choruses to the songs, and smoked and drank amidst a very Babel of riot and noise. In this room, one night, a little excitable Frenchman drunk himself into a state of madness, and, calling for a dozen of Champagne, knocked the necks off half the bottles, and poured the wine upon the ground; and three minutes afterwards, in a wild delirium, he lit his pipe with a five-pound note.

So days and weeks passed, and every day and every week the gold-field grew and grew until it extended over many miles. With magical celerity a city was built, and before the birth of a new moon the thousand and one institutions of a civilised life were growing in the light of enterprise and industry. Streets were laid out, roads were made, newspapers and banks were established, a theatre was erected; and while the busy life of the city was in full glow, homely men were building modest snuggeries in the suburbs, and the welcome faces of women and children began to be seen.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### OLD FLICK.

OLD FLICK's dwelling-place was in a narrow thoroughfare—so narrow, that Old Flick might have shaken hands with his neighbour on the opposite side of the way without moving from his own side of the pavement. Not that he ever tried the experiment; Old Flick was not given to the shaking of hands, and was as secret and close as the grave. The thoroughfare was a misnomer; for if you walked about twenty yards beyond Old Flick's dwelling-place, you came, to your great discomfiture, plump upon the dead wall of a building which checked all further progress. Many deluded pedestrians, who had strolled into the place, curious to know whither it led, had been compelled to retire in dudgeon. A clever speculator had purchased the land round about Old Flick's dwelling, and had mapped it out and built upon it with so much ingenuity, that when he came to Old Flick's

Thoroughfare, which was the last built upon, he, to his exceeding surprise, found himself blocked in; and, rushing to his plans, discovered that he had given himself a few feet of land more upon paper than he actually possessed upon earth. But he derived consolation from the thought that he had accomplished his object, which was, to build as many tenements as he could crowd upon his freehold, and to allow as little walking and breathing space as possible to his tenantry. This result being successfully attained, he took a first-class passage home, and retired to Bermondsey, where he lives to the present day upon the results of his ingenuity, and talks continually, in grandiloquent strains, of his estates in Victoria.

Old Flick's Thoroughfare, as it had grown to be called, boasted of about two feet of pavement and six feet of road, and contained sixteen tenements—eight on each side. In the owner's plan of the estate, which decorated the walls of his parlour in Bermondsey, it was represented as a magnificent street, lined on each side with handsome edifices, four storeys high, and crowded with carriages and pedestrians of the most fashionable character; whereas, in truth, the tenements were each composed of but one storey, and there was scarcely

room in the road to wheel a barrow. Over the portico of Old Flick's dwelling was the inscription :—

OLD FLICK'S

ALL-SORTS STORE.

WHOLESALE, RETAIL, AND FOR EXPORTATION.

For be it here remarked, it is the fashion of most small traders in the colonies to sell everything down to oranges and gingerbread, "wholesale, retail, and for exportation." It is an idiosyncrasy peculiar to the class. In the windows of Old Flick's Allsorts Store was heaped the most worthless collection of worthless articles that could possibly be compressed within so small a space. Blunt saws, dirty pannikins, broken crockery, worn-out dog collars, two-bladed penknives, empty ink bottles, rust-eaten picks and shovels, a few torn books, the broken works of two or three clocks and watches, with a multitude of other utterly incongruous things, were tumbled indiscriminately upon each other. In one pane there was an advertisement to the effect that "Doctor Flick prescribed for and cured every disorder incidental to the human frame, at the lowest possible rates;" and in another pane appeared the announcement that Old Flick was a land and estate

agent, and collected rents and debts, and acted as the confidential adviser of all persons in trouble and difficulty, and that secrecy and despatch might be relied upon. To show that he was ready for consultation or active business, Old Flick, with his palsied frame and blear eyes, might be seen, half the day, standing in ragged slippers, at his door, on the watch for customers. He might not inaptly have been likened to an ugly spider on the look-out for flies.

The origin of Old Flick was wrapped in mystery. Nothing further was known of him than that he had sprung up suddenly in Canvas Town, in the early days of the gold-diggings, and that, when that motley delectability was swept away, he had migrated to the blind alley to which he gave his name, and which had just then been formed by the operations of the Bermondsey speculator. Canvas Town, when Old Flick first made his appearance there, was indeed a delectable locality. Take a few acres of level ground, where in the winter people sank over their ancles in thick mud, and where in the summer they were blinded with the fine dust which an Australian hot wind drove mercilessly in their faces; divide the ground into the narrowest and most irregular of streets and lanes; erect (if it may

be so called) upon it a few hundreds of canvas tents, of all sizes and shapes, which in a civilised city would not be thought fit for pigs or poultry ; smoke-dry the entire space until the canvas of the tents becomes black and rotten, and hangs in shreds from weak battens and crazy poles ; let the wretched habitations be tenanted by gaol-refuse, by unscrupulous traders, by dismayed and distressed immigrants who have journeyed over stormy seas in search of gold, by brute faces and kind faces, by flaunting women and ladies of tender rearing ; let the spaces be choked up with packing-cases, and immigrants' trunks, and crying children, and perplexed wanderers from distant lands ; above all, let no vice be hidden, let no shame be shame-faced : and a reasonably correct picture of Canvas Town, Melbourne, in the early days of the gold-diggings, will be portrayed. But even in Canvas Town, where probably was assembled the most incongruous mass of human beings ever congregated together ; where thief and gentleman slept with but the division of a strip of calico between them, and where ladies cooked their family meals, and washed their family clothes, in the open thoroughfares—even there, Old Flick was a mystery. He was a tall, thin, stooping man, with an unwholesome-looking face, always

stubbled and dirty. He was a dealer in everything, whether honestly come by or not, and professed himself a doctor; and as a proof of his skill he was in the habit of exhibiting a musty, yellow, old cash-book, in which were inscribed more than fifty testimonials from grateful patients who had been cured of lumbago, tooth-ache, and other plagues which human flesh is heir to. He was sixty years of age, or thereabouts, and he was so shaky that he could scarcely hold a glass to his lips without spilling half its contents. He said it was ague; others said it was rum. At the time of his introduction to the reader, he was standing at his door, as usual, in his ragged slippers, with his bleary eyes looking frequently over his shoulder to the room at the back of his store. While thus engaged, he was accosted by Milly, whose manner and appearance betokened that she had been drinking.

"Hallo! Old Flick! Who is inside?"

"No one, Milly," he answered.

"What a liar you are, Flick!" said Milly.  
"Jim's inside, and you know it."

"Jim isn't inside," he returned. "You're drunk."

"I say, Old Flick," said Milly, "I never saw you blush. Tell the truth for once, and set your face on fire."

Old Flick looked venomously at the girl, but she only laughed at him in return.

"Go in, and tell Jim I want to speak to him," she said.

"I have told you he isn't there," responded old Flick.

"All right. Then I'll sit here and wait for him;" and she sat down on the pavement in front of the store. Old Flick was in despair. He glared at her, and swore at her.

"Get up, you she-devil!" he quavered, in a voice shaking with passion.

"I shan't. If you call me names, I'll pull your whiskers out."

"Go away, Milly," said Old Flick, coaxingly; "go away, there's a dear! You'll have the peelers on you, and if Jim hears you——"

"Oh, he *is* in there, is he!" exclaimed Milly, rising to her feet.

"Yes, but it's more than my life's worth to disturb him. Go away, quietly, there's a dear!"

"All right," she said; "just you tell him, when you go in, to come home soon. I didn't want to see him, you old fool. I only wanted to know where he was. Oh, what a liar you are, Flick!"

And giving him a playful pinch on his withered cheek, she walked away, singing.

In the back room of Old Flick's dwelling was assembled a quartette, each member of which bore upon his face a certificate for the gallows. It was composed of Jim Pizey, Black Sam, Ned Rutt, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman. Spirits and glasses were on the table, and the room was filled with smoke.

"That's arranged, then," said Jim Pizey; "we meet at Gisborne this day fortnight?"

His companions nodded.

"Until then," he continued, "try quietly to find out where Dick Handfield has got to."

"If I knew where that milk-faced woman of his was," said Ned Rutt, with a dark look, "I'd soon work it out of her."

"Strike me blind!" exclaimed the Tenderhearted Oysterman. "You don't mean to say you'd hurt a woman?"

"Wouldn't I?" sneered Ned Rutt. "You wouldn't hurt a woman, of course, Oysterman?"

"Strike me dizzy!" exclaimed the Oysterman. "I wouldn't hurt a fly."

"There's that young devil, Grif," said Pizey; "he knows where Dick Handfield is. If you could



get hold of him and frighten him, Oysterman, he might tell."

"I'd frighten him if I got hold of him," muttered the Oysterman, with a villanous scowl.

"Come here, Old Flick," shouted Jim Pizey, striking the table violently, and putting an end to the discussion. "Come here, you bag of rattling old bones, and let's settle up with you."

Which settling-up caused a great deal of whining on the part of Old Flick, and a great deal of cursing on the part of the quartette.

"Milly's been here, Jim," said Old Flick, when the settling was arranged, and Ned Rutt and Black Sam had departed. "She kicked up a nice row! I had as much as I could do to prevent her coming in."

"She'll be whimpering nicely when she knows I'm going away," said Pizey, with a touch of softness in his voice, for bad as he was, he had a sincere affection for the girl. "I haven't told her, and don't intend to. I shall leave that job to you, Flick. And now just listen to what I say, and don't miss a word."

With their heads close together, Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman laid bare their scheme. It was complete in its villanousness.

Highway robbery, burglary, murder—they would stop short at nothing.

“Never mind about Dick Handfield giving us the slip,” said Jim. “He’s gone up the country, that’s certain; we shall hear something of him, and when we do, he shan’t escape us a second time.”

“I’ll lay a trap for him when I come across him,” said the Oysterman with a lowering look, “that he’ll be clever to get out of. A better trap than the forged five-pound note.”

“What do you think of our plan, Flick?” asked Pizey.

“It sounds very well, Jim,” said Old Flick. “But I’ve heard such lots of these schemes, and they’ve all ended in smoke.”

“And why?” asked Jim Pizey, with passion. “Why have they all ended in smoke? Because, when everything has been cut and dried, some white-livered thief grew squeamish, and backed out of it; or because the infernal cowards have turned dainty at the sight of a drop of blood, and didn’t have heart enough among the lot of ’em to kill a man! But this shan’t end so—if any man turns tail when I am leading, I’ll give him six barrels, one after another; he shall never turn tail again! We’ve got the right lot this time; there are four of

us down here, and I can reckon upon four up the country. Grif's father's one of 'em. When we've got them altogether, perhaps we'll 'stick up' the gold escort. I'll take care we won't bungle over it. We'll kill every damned trooper among 'em."

"But we won't hurt 'em, Flick," said the Tender hearted Oysterman. "If I thought we should hurt the poor coves, I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

"There shan't be many left to blab about it," said Jim. "How would you like to have your hands in the gold-boxes, Flick, and run the dust through your fingers, eh?" Old Flick's eye glistened, and his fingers twitched, as if they were already playing with the precious dust. "How would you like to buy it at so much a measureful—eh, Flick? That's the way lots of it was sold after the 'Nelson' was stuck up in Hobson's Bay."

"Ah," said Old Flick, pensively, "that was smart trick, that was! But then men had pluck in them."

"It's all very well to say that," grumbled Jim. "I could find men with lots of pluck, but there are no opportunities, worse luck!"

"Only think," said Old Flick, gloating upon the

subject ; " the dark night ; the ship ready for sea, and going to sail the next day ; the gold on board ; the captain and officers on shore. I can see it all. The ship lies snugly at anchor ; a boat with muffled oars, comes quietly to the side ; half a dozen plucky men glide up like snakes on to the deck. Down goes the watch, gagged and bound in no time ! The iron boxes, filled with gold—a hundred thousand ounces—are lowered into the boat, and in a few minutes the brave fellows are pulling back to shore, made for life." And Old Flick's villanous face brightened, and his eyes glistened.

" Made for life ! " sneered Jim. " Not they ! They were robbed right and left by such villains as yourself. I could lay my hands on a man in this town who would only put down a hundred sovereigns for every tin measure of gold-dust he bought. A fairish-sized measure, too ! "

" That's the way they do us poor hard-working coves," grumbled the Oysterman. " Why, every one of them measures was worth a thousand pounds ! He ought to be had up for embezzlement."

And thus conversing, they sat together until late in the night, hatching their villanous schemes ; and when they departed, Old Flick chuckled, and

rubbed his hands, and with one leg, and nearly the whole of the other, in the grave, indulged in anticipations of a glowing future, as he drank his rum-and-water.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### LITTLE PETER IS PROVIDED FOR.

SAILING down the stream of life in his new moral boat, of which he, the Moral Shoeblack, was the Skipper, Grif was often at a loss what to do with his leisure time. Having relinquished his profession of vagrancy, he no longer felt himself at liberty to wander through the streets without an object. He had an instinctive foreboding that the Eye of the public was upon him, and was watching that he did not misconduct himself. Every time he met that Eye (and he met it as often as he dared to look into the human face) it appeared to be holding up a warning finger, if such a metaphor may be allowed. It appeared to say, Take care, now ; be careful ; no slouching about and trying to deceive ME ; I am watching you ! He was so acutely sensitive of this that it soon became his custom of an evening, when his day's work was done, to wander into the suburbs, that he might escape from the Eye which distressed

him in the city's crowded streets. His day's work often proved, in its result, a delusion and a snare and on many and many an evening did he gather together the implements of his trade, and walk away without a sixpence in his pocket. He had no place where he could safely deposit his boot-stamps and brushes, so wherever he wandered he carried them with him.

Behold him now, with these badges of his office slung round his shoulders, sauntering down a shady lane, with Little Peter by his side. For Little Peter was better. Milly had nursed him through his illness, and by her care had restored him to health. Was he grateful? It is hard to say. Little Peter's mind was almost a blank. He suffered without repining; he enjoyed without rejoicing. He took things as they came and never dreamt that any effort on his part could alter them. After a scanty meal came hunger, and he waited patiently for the next poor crumbs which charity bestowed upon him and which he received without gratitude. Then he hungered again and so on. It was all one to him. Whether it were night or day was a matter of indifference.

Walking along listlessly by the side of his bes

friend, he paid no heed to the beauty of nature, nor to the balmy air of evening. With Grif it was different. He was keenly alive to the joys and sorrows of life, and to all its surroundings. Even now, although he was hungry, and heart-sore, and weary, he looked from side to side with eager wonder and delight. The soft breeze was sweet to him, and he breathed it in so gratefully that the shadow of a spiritual beauty stole into his common face. He felt and rejoiced with nature that summer was coming. The clouds smiled at its approach, and as Zephyr whispered the glad tidings to field and forest, pretty blossoms peeped shyly out from the bosom of the earth, wondering if winter had really taken its departure. Grif was far from insensible to these influences, and the delicious air of spring was in some measure a recompense to him for the sufferings of his lot. So he sat him down under a hawthorn hedge, hungry yet grateful, and Little Peter sat beside him, looking at the blood of the dying sun staining the western sky.

Not far from where he sat was the house of Nicholas Nuttall. The female head of that house was in a high state of glorification, for Matthew, their rich brother, had dined with them that day,



and had behaved so graciously that visions of future greatness grew in her imagination. Matthew was a single man; of that fact she had made herself sure by a process of cross-examination to which she had subjected her lord and master the previous night. Certainly, her task had not been an easy one, for Nicholas was singularly reticent and hesitating in his replies to her eager queries; but goaded, pushed thereto by his wife's perseverance, he had at length given her to understand that his brother had no family.

"And why you should have endeavoured to keep the fact from me," Mrs. Nicholas had said, before composing herself to sleep, "is beyond my comprehension. I am not a murderess, and I don't wish to poison your brother—I may say *our* brother—tomorrow at dinner. But you always *were* aggravating, Nicholas. I wonder I've a bit of flesh left on my bones!"

"You haven't much," thought Nicholas as, shifting himself in bed, he came in contact with some of her bony protuberances; "you have worn it nearly all away by nagging."

But Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was satisfied. She had ascertained that Matthew had no family, and that was sufficient for her. Whether he were a

widower or a bachelor was immaterial. He had no ties, and Nicholas was his only brother. Nicholas was, therefore, the natural heir to the property, and the one remaining duty her newly-found brother-in-law owed to his family was not to remain too long upon earth. Such a proceeding would be manifestly indecent.

Dinner was over, and Matthew and Nicholas were sitting in the verandah, smoking their cigars. Had Matthew wished to smoke in the drawing-room he might have done so ; indeed, Mrs. Nuttall had hinted as much, had even tried to prevail upon him to do so. She was so fond of smoke ! nothing was so agreeable as a good cigar ! the fragrance, and all that, was so delicious ! (It was lucky for Nicholas that the wife of his bosom did not see the sly smile which played about his lips while she was uttering these rhapsodies.) But Matthew Nuttall would not be persuaded. He was too shrewd a man not to see through the small soul of Mrs. Nicholas, and he valued her excess of politeness at exactly its proper worth.

Thus it was that, notwithstanding the importunities of Mrs. Nuttall, Matthew and his brother were sitting in the verandah smoking their cigars. When he had consented to dine with them he made

it a special provision that no guests were to be invited to meet him; it was to be a quiet family dinner. And Mrs. Nuttall, although inwardly disappointed—for she had laid out plans for a grand entertainment in honour of the rich squatter, a entertainment which would humiliate her neighbours (there is even that sort of pride in the Australian colonies)—wisely deferred to his wish. They had spent a pleasant afternoon. Mrs. Nuttall was amiability personified, although her graciousness was a trifle too obtrusive; and both Matthew and Nicholas, without any thought of pounds, shillings, and pence, were genuinely glad to renew brotherly relations. They sat together in silence each engrossed in his own special thoughts. Nicholas was speculating upon his brother's previous life. From what Matthew had said to him on the occasion of their first meeting, he knew that there was present unhappiness connected with it—some domestic misery which even now, in spite of all his obstinate attempts at concealment, was preying upon his heart. Nothing could more surely denote this than his behaviour to his niece Marian. Now, he would be all tenderness to her, would speak to her affectionately, caressingly and now, as if some sudden remembrance had

risen which chilled the tender feeling, he would turn cold and stern, and would strive to steel himself against her girlish graces and fascinations. It was happiness and torture to be in her society, for she reminded him of his daughter. When she was present he juggled with his senses, and, shutting his eyes, believed that it was Alice who was in the room. He could feel her presence about him, and while the impression was strong upon him, the love he bore to her came back to his heart, bringing with it a painful sense of desolation. For he did love her, in spite of all; he did love her, although he would never look upon her face again. To that he was pledged. He had told her he would never see her again unless she renounced her husband; at the time he had told her, and ever since, he knew that she would be faithful to her marriage vows—he knew that she would be faithful till death to the man she had chosen. The words he had spoken to her on the night she made her last appeal to him were constantly recurring to him: “The day you ran away from your home I resolved to shut you from my heart as long as you were tied to that scheming scapegrace.” Ah! but could he shut her from his heart? No, he felt that he could not do that. Her sweet pale face was for

ever pleading to him. It was indelibly stamped upon his mind, and he could not efface it. Not long ago, when he was in his grand house at Highlay Station, he rose from his bed one night, and went to the room she used to occupy. There he sat down, and conjured her before him. Then he went outside the house, and looked around. All was his as far as he could see, and miles beyond and on every side of him. He was lord of range and gully, and all that was thereon. Forests of iron-bark and gum, tens of thousands of sheep, vast herds of oxen, droves of horses, the growing wealth of mountain and plain, were his. He was lord of all. Yet, as he stood there gazing on his greatness, he would have gladly bartered it for his daughter's love. Thus much he confessed to himself. He knew his own weakness, but the world should not know it. He owed it to himself that he should be consistent in this. Often and often he thought to himself that Alice might be in want, might be suffering. Well, if she suffered, did he not suffer also? The worst of suffering was his. The suffering of a lonely life, unblessed by a single caress. No, not one—not one loving smile, not one bright look, of the tender light of which he could say, "This is for me, from the heart; it is not

"bought." Worshipper as he was of the power of money, these thoughts came home to him, and brought desolation with them.

The soft sycophancy of Mrs. Nuttall disgusted him; he knew well enough what evoked it. And he marvelled how it was that his brother, who was unselfish and tender-hearted, could have married such a cross-grained woman. "But I suppose Nicholas did not know her nature until it was too late," he thought; "all women are false—all women are two-faced, deceitful, or mean, or selfish, or something worse." All? He knew he was lying to himself. All women were not so. The remembrance of his married life rose before him, for it had been a happy one. His wife had been to him an angel of devotion and goodness. All women were not bad; but he took a stern delight in striving to make himself believe so.

Nicholas had been watching the shadows of sad remembrance pass over his brother's face; he was getting to be an old man, but his heart was very tender to his brother, and he yearned to administer consolation.

"Mat," he said, "you are not happy."

"No, I am not." The reply was drawn from him almost involuntarily.

"Can I do anything?"

"Nothing, Nic." He paused for a short while, and then, laying his hand upon his brother's arm, he said, "When we first met I hinted that I did not wish my domestic life touched upon. I may one day speak of it to you; until then, let it remain a sealed book between us." Nicholas bent his head. "I think it is your pretty little blossom, Marian, that has opened my wounds this afternoon, for I—I once had a daughter myself." He passed his hand across his eyes, and rose. "I see Marian in the garden," he said; "I will take a stroll with her."

He pressed his brother's hand, and joined Marian. Nicholas looked after him, and sighed. "So rich," he said, "and so unhappy! I am happier than he, notwithstanding—yes, notwithstanding that I am blessed with Mrs. Nuttall." The appearance of that lady upon the verandah just at the moment he uttered this qualification, made him feel very guilty, and he mutely thanked Heaven that she had not heard him.

"Where is brother Matthew, my dear?" she inquired, in her most sugary tones.

"He is taking a stroll with Marian," replied her spouse, pointing to the two figures in the

distance. "They are just turning into the lane."

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall looked, and seated herself with a satisfied air. Things were going on famously. Matthew would make his niece his heiress. Should they stop in the colony, or return to England when that event occurred? It might occur any day. People went off so suddenly in these hot climates. As she pondered, the servant came on to the verandah with coffee, of which Nicholas took a cup thankfully. It was not every day that such attention was paid him. Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall declined coffee. Her soul was too highly attuned for such common beverage.

"She is a dear good girl!" she mused.

"That she is, Maria," assented Nicholas, sipping his coffee, "and her wages are not at all high, as wages go. So neat and tidy, too!"

"Of whom are you speaking, Mr. Nuttall?" asked Mrs. Nuttall, with a lofty stare of surprise at her husband.

"Of Jane, my dear, the new servant, of course."

"I referred to our child," said Mrs. Nuttall, in her grandest tones, which always conveyed a frozen sensation to Mr. Nuttall's marrow; "to our child,



Marian. You do not suppose that I should speak in that manner of a menial."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I am sure," apologised Nicholas, very crest-fallen. The next moment he almost choked himself in an attempt to hide his shame by swallowing his coffee too hastily.

Mrs. Nuttall regarded with complacency his efforts to recover his breath. His punishment was just.

"A dear good girl," repeated the lady, with emphasis, when Nicholas's struggles had subsided. "And I shouldn't wonder if she mightn't look as high as a lord, or even a marquis."

"I shouldn't wonder either, Maria," said Nicholas, profoundly stupified by his wife's words. "I have often looked as high myself."

"The coffee has surely got into your head, Mr. Nuttall," observed Mrs. Nuttall, with a look of supreme contempt.

"I must have coughed it up, I suppose, my dear," said Nicholas, jocularly; he was fond of his joke, and enjoyed it even when Mrs. Nuttall's freezing influence was upon him. "Don't be alarmed, Maria. It will settle down eventually."

"Your coarse wit is beneath contempt," exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, severely, "and is cruelly out

of place when the happiness of our only child is concerned."

"Upon my soul, I haven't the slightest idea what you mean, Maria."

"Then I shall not explain, sir," said Mrs. Nuttall, rising with dignity, and walking away.

Nicholas, perfectly satisfied at being deprived of her company, disposed himself for a nap. Clearly, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was not a model for husbands.

In the meantime, Grif and Little Peter had not moved from where they had at first seated themselves, under the shadow of the hawthorn hedge. Their conversation had not been very animated. Once, Grif had asked Little Peter if he was hungry, and Little Peter had answered, Yes. And then Grif had unconsciously constituted himself a committee of ways and means, and found that he was totally unable to vote the supplies. Time was when, Little Peter being hungry, Grif would issue forth and prowl about and beg, or steal perhaps; at all events, he would seldom return to Little Peter without food, obtained somehow or other. He could not do that now; he had taken the pledge of honesty; he had renounced vagrancy, and he was helpless. Glancing at Little Peter every now

and then, he began to be perplexed with an entirely new consideration. It was this. Little Peter was hungry. Grif had only one means open of obtaining food. Supposing he was unfortunate the next day, and was unable to supply Little Peter's stomach, what was to be done? Here was a great difficulty; and looking it steadily in the face, it dawned grimly upon Grif's mind that Little Peter was a serious responsibility.

Engaged in the contemplation of this subject, Grif became suddenly aware of the approach of two long shadows, and looking up, saw Matthew Nuttall and Marian. Although the day was waning fast, he recognised Alice's father on the instant. Their eyes met at the same moment, and Matthew stopped. Marian, whose hand was resting lightly on her uncle's arm, looked at the two lads with compassion.

"You are the boy who came to Mr. Blemish's office for a situation one day when I was there," said Matthew Nuttall in a tone of inquiry.

Grif looked an affirmative. He did not dare to trust himself to speak just yet.

"And Mr. Blemish kindly gave you one," said Matthew.

Grif looked another affirmative.

"Are you doing well?"

"No, sir," Grif found voice to reply.

"He looks very miserable, uncle," said Marian, in a half whisper; "and see that other little boy there. Is he asleep?"

"No, miss; he is hungry," Grif had to check a rising sob as he said this. "Look up, Little Peter."

Little Peter looked up with his large pleading eyes, and then turned his face to the ground again.

"He seems ill, uncle," whispered Marian. "Shall I run to the house, and bring him something to eat?"

"Hush! my dear," said Matthew Nuttall, taking the girl's hand in his. The little bit of womanly sympathy reminded him of his daughter, who never allowed a poor man to go hungry from Highlay Station. "Wait a moment. Is he your brother?" This to Grif.

"No, sir."

"Any relation?"

"Not as I knows on."

"Why are you two together?"

"I takes care on him," said Grif; "but I don't know what to do now. I ain't got nothin' to give him to eat."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Marian.

But he did not release her hand.

"Where is his mother and father?"

"Got none."

"And yours?"

"Got none." Grif told the lie readily enough. He was ashamed of his father, and did not want to be questioned about him.

"What have you earned to-day?"

"Nothin'."

"And have you had nothing to eat?"

"Not since this mornin'."

"How am I to know that you are telling the truth?"

The tears came to Grif's eyes. He would have given a saucy independent answer, but the thought of Little Peter restrained him. He did the best thing he could. He was silent.

"And you have no money?"

Grif turned out his pockets. Every one of them was full of holes. He had answered Matthew Nuttall's questions quietly and sadly, not in that reckless defiant manner which Matthew remembered he had used in Mr. Blemish's office. This itself pleaded for him. The stern man of the world knew genuine suffering when he saw it before him. The very hopelessness which spoke out of Grif's voice was in the lad's favour. He felt a

desire to befriend Grif. But there were more questions to ask before he determined.

"When you applied to Mr. Blemish for a situation, you said you had given a promise to a lady. What was your promise?"

"I promised to be honest," answered Grif, wondering whether Matthew Nuttall had any suspicion who the lady was.

"And you have kept your promise?"

"Yes."

"Why do you not go to the lady now you are hungry, and ask her for assistance?"

"I don't like to," said Grif. "Somethin' pulls me back. She's hardly got enough for herself, I think. She'd give it me out of her own mouth, she would. She's poor—but she's good, mind! I never knowed any one so good as her! And I'd lay down my life for her this minute if she wanted me to!" He burned to tell who she was; he forgot his own cause when he spoke of her. Ah! if he could make her happy! But some feeling restrained him—some fear that he might make matters worse for Alice if her father knew that she was a friend and companion to him, who was no better than a thief.

"He speaks the truth, uncle, I am sure," said Marian.

"And so am I, my dear." He considered how he could best assist them. "You lead a hard life," he presently said.

"I don't care for myself," Grif said; "only for Little Peter."

"Well, I will send you and Little Peter on to one of my Stations, if you like, where you can learn to make yourself useful, and where at all events you will have enough to eat and drink. Anything else will depend upon yourself. What do you say?"

Grif's mind was made up in an instant. For Little Peter—yes. For himself—no. He could not leave Alice. He would starve sooner.

"Will you take Little Peter, sir, and not me?" he asked, in a trembling voice. "I can't leave this, sir. I've made a promise, and daren't break it. The lady who's been kind to me might want me, and I mustn't be away. I shan't like to part with Little Peter, sir, but it'll be for his good. He's often hungry when I've got nothin' to give him to eat. I ain't give him anythin' to-day, and p'rhaps shan't be able to to-morrow. Don't say no, sir! Take Little Peter, and not me, and I'll do anythin'—anythin' but go away from where *she* is." And Grif burst into a passion of tears, and stood imploringly before Alice's father.

He turned to his niece, and she caught his hand and pressed it to her lips. He needed no stronger appeal in his then softening mood.

"It shall be as you ask," he said. "Little Peter, as you call him, shall go with us now."

Grif lifted Little Peter to his feet. "This gentleman's going to take care of you, Peter," he said. "You'll never be hungry no more." Little Peter opened his eyes very wide. "You're to go with the gentleman," Grif continued, "and he'll give you plenty to eat and drink. You are not sorry to part with me, are you?"

"No," replied Little Peter, with perfect sincerity.

A keen pang of disappointment caused Grif to press his nails into his hands; he threw a troubled look at Little Peter, but he soon recovered himself, and taking the child's wasted hand, he said, tenderly, "Good bye, Little Peter."

"Good bye," said Little Peter, without the slightest show of feeling.

A big lump rose in Grif's throat as he stooped to kiss the lad. He touched his ragged cap when Matthew Nuttall gave him a piece of silver.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "You'll take care on him?"

Matthew Nuttall nodded, and the three walked



away. So Grif and Little Peter parted. Grif gazed after the lad, but Little Peter did not turn his head to give his more than brother one parting look of affection. "Never mind," Grif thought, with a heavy sigh; "he'll never be hungry no more." He sat upon the ground, and watched them till they were out of sight. He was alone now. Rough was dead, and Little Peter was gone, for ever. Ah! How lonely everything seemed! But there was comfort in the thought that Little Peter was provided for, and would always have his grub and a blanket. With that reflection to console him, Grif laid him down beneath the hawthorn hedge, and went to sleep with the stars shining upon him.

THE END OF VOL. I.



1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".



